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THE

WORDS OF THE RISEN SAVIOUR,

AND COMMENTARY ON

THE EPISTLE OF ST JAMES.

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

WHEN the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. xv. 8 places the appearance of *the risen* and exalted Jesus *to himself* in direct continuation with the earlier appearances of the Forty Days—without making express mention of the ascension—it might appear that he recognises no distinction between the time before, and the time after, that event; and the meaning which he intended to convey is undoubtedly this, that the same Person who, from the moment of His resurrection, had begun to enter into His glory, after His suffering and death, had appeared and said to him—*I am this Jesus*. Still more striking, and equally important in its bearing, is the fact that Ananias, in Acts xxii. 14, 15, places the seeing and hearing to which St Paul was chosen, on a level with *that* seeing and hearing which (according to ch. i. 21, 22) was the qualification of one who should be a "witness to all men of that which he had seen and heard"—that is, of an *Apostle*. The Lord's life of humiliation and His life of glory are here really embraced in one comprehensive glance; hence, Ananias used the same expression, "the Just One," which Stephen used in ch. vii. 52. All this emphatically teaches us that the transaction with the Apostle Paul must be classed among those manifestations of our Lord which, notwithstanding the intervening glorification in heaven, were *bodily* manifestations. Jesus *appeared* to him (Acts ix. 17, xxvi. 16) as to those who saw Him before the ascension; although, on the other hand,

St Paul forgets not, before Agrippa (ch. xxvi. 19), to lay stress upon the *heavenly* vision.

This last passage teaches us further that the *ascension*, as the final consummating point of the exaltation of Jesus, must, notwithstanding all this, maintain its place. We denounce the blasphemy of those who, with Brennecke, of melancholy memory, fable that Christ lived upon earth twenty-seven years after His crucifixion, planning all kinds of appearances to His disciples; as well as the theory of Kinkel, which has found too much favour with the learned, that there was no real ascension after the resurrection. The different manner in which the Lord appeared and spoke, after His visible ascension, of itself establishes the distinction most firmly; apart from the authentic narrative of that event, and the subsequent doctrine founded upon it. For, although St Paul, according to his essentially correct system, ordinarily gives prominence only to the resurrection (with its infolded results) as the definite point of transition between the humiliation and exaltation of Christ—even as the Church kept Easter first, and only afterwards added the festival of the Ascension—yet the same Apostle speaks abundantly of the Redeemer's session at the right hand of God in heaven (Eph. i. 20, etc., iv. 10; comp. Heb. iv. 14, viii. 1, ix. 24), in the same manner as St Peter does, 1 Pet. iii. 22.

We have, therefore, scriptural ground for literally understanding, as the Church has ever believed and confessed, both the "I am not yet ascended" and the "I ascend" of the risen Lord Himself (John xx. 17), and the "He is ascended" of His witnesses; consequently, we are justified in saying that, as the discourses of the risen Jesus were still uttered upon earth, the words of the exalted Jesus are distinctively words *from heaven*. "The discourses of the Lord Jesus," taken in their strict universality, were not closed with the last sayings of the ascending Christ (Acts i. 8, 9); and the supplement which was promised at the close of our larger exposition must now introduce the essentially *last* words.

Were they absolutely the last? It may be said, in another sense, that the Lord has never ceased to speak to His people, and never will cease to speak to them; that is, by the *Holy Ghost*. But, with the same propriety as the Lord Himself and the entire New Testament make the distinction, we may dis-

tinguish between the recorded sayings of the personal Jesus, speaking from heaven, and His internal revelation by the Spirit. It is a different matter, and one which falls not within the range of the task which we propose, that we find *the Spirit speaking* to Philip on the way to Gaza, Acts viii. 29, as the same Spirit *caught him away* in ver. 39; and that the Spirit speaks to Peter, ch. x. 19 (xi. 12), even as the angel to Cornelius. With these we must class also the forbidding of the Spirit (and, according to the more correct reading, of the Spirit *of Jesus*), ch. xvi. 6, 7,[1] which may have been by an audible word heard internally; but St Luke expressly distinguishes the speaking of the Spirit from the *personal* announcements of the Lord, whether speaking in broad day or in night visions. In ch. xiii. 1, 2, where the *prophets* of the New Testament are spoken of, he passes over into the general expression, "the *Holy* Spirit," to indicate this indirect, mediated, and continuous intercourse with His people.

Thus the "words of the Lord Jesus from heaven"—so far as the Scripture records them—retain and exhibit their distinctive peculiarity in this, that the glorified bodily personality of the God-man is manifested, or gives itself expression, with the voice of the individual *I*. This, on the one hand, is *still* just as in the Forty Days, inasfar as the personal fellowship, suspended in the rule, is renewed in the exception; on the other hand, there is a great difference, inasmuch as the familiarity which still existed during those days, as they were in some sense linked with His former life upon earth, has utterly ceased, and can never return, even on the occasions of His deepest condescension. But still the unbroken unity and identity of His person, of that person which had sunk into the depths of shame and death, is preserved—I am *Jesus of Nazareth!* (Acts xxii. 8) I was *dead!* (Rev. i. 18); just as at an earlier period He who was going to His death could say—Glorify me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was!

These manifestations and self-announcements, these direct words and utterances of the enthroned Lord, could not indeed have been utterly wanting upon earth in this final term of transition: they were His superabundant confirmation of His promise and pledge concerning His disciples' not seeing and yet

[1] In ch. xviii. 5, "Spirit" is a false reading for "Word."

believing, their not seeing and yet possessing Him. They were the final assurances with which from heaven He greeted earth, and sealed His farewell word upon the Mount of Olives. "*Behold*, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." What if nothing of this kind had transpired, and been recorded, since His departure? It is true that the pentecostal believers in their first vigour needed no such testimony to corroborate their growing experience that the Lord was with them; they assuredly neither sought nor expected any such evidence. But Israel, perishing in unbelief, and persecuting the Church, might be expected to receive such a supernumerary self-testimony of the Persecuted; though, in the nature of the case, only in the person of a man who had been one of themselves, who testified to them what he had seen, and confirmed that testimony through the whole of life. Further, all the world, and even the enfeebled and secularised Christendom of the future, needed such a final fulfilment—given as the pledge of its last fulfilment—of the word which had been spoken before the tribunal of man, "Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven!" But this could take place only through the indirect mediation of others; thus, at the commencement of these personal annunciations of the exalted Lord, Stephen testified before them of his seeing the Son of Man in heaven; and Saul soon afterwards of his having both seen and heard the Lord.

Spinoza is said to have declared that if he could admit the fact of the resurrection of Lazarus, he would demolish his system and become a Christian. Wherefore could he not believe the Apostle Paul, and the testimony of his whole apostolical life, to the personal manifestations of the Son of God? It may be observed, generally, that the revelations and words of the Lord Jesus, after His ascension, have not received their fitting tribute of attention from the scientific theology even of the orthodox. For example, in Hase's excellent book, "The Life of the Glorified Redeemer in Heaven, according to His own Words," there is no place given to His *own sayings* after the ascension; although such words as Acts xxvi. 16–18, xviii. 9, 10, and especially Rev. i. 17, etc., xxi. 5, are most mighty testimonies, and confirm, in their collective force, most emphatically the witness of the Forty Days, "It is I myself." It might almost

seem that in these times the immediate truth and reality of the records which contain the announcements of Jesus from heaven were themselves regarded with some degree of suspicion.

But the scriptural testimonies concerning them, standing in their sublime simplicity in the midst of other plain historical narratives, demand the most absolute faith; more especially as they exhibit to us that gradual transition to purely spiritual revelation which approves itself to our understanding as what might have been expected. For, although it is probable that not all the "signs" and "infallible proofs" have been placed on record (John xx. 30; Acts i. 3)—although the Lord may frequently, especially in the earlier time, have spoken to His disciples "in vision," and St Paul speaks expressly of other revelations (most plainly in 1 Cor. xi. 23; comp. 2 Cor. xii. 1, and already in Acts xxvi. 16)—yet that which the Scripture does record, appears to us to mark out the definite process by which the revelations of our Lord were gradually withdrawn into the internal domain of the Spirit.

In the first actual utterance of His *words* from heaven, (after Stephen had beheld Him looking down), He is both seen and heard in His perfect bodily personality; in broad day, with a manifestation which appealed to the sense, not of Paul alone, but of those also who accompanied him. And He seems to say—as it were, ignoring the ascension, but in reality giving it its right explanation—"I can appear whenever and wherever I will; I have not in such a sense gone into heaven that heaven has received and shut me in!" (According to a false rendering of Acts iii. 21.) Concurrently, there is the more mediate and less direct word to Ananias *in vision* (Acts ix. 10). The succeeding "appearances" to St Paul, Acts xxvi. 16—where we may more exactly translate, "which I will cause thee to see *of Myself*"[1]—have no longer the manner of His first appearance, in which Saul beholds Him plainly and awfully in the broad daylight of life. We read in Acts xxii. 17, that the Apostle was *in a trance* while praying, and thus beheld the Lord who spake to him. So with St Peter (ch. x. 13), where the *voice* of Him whom he addresses as Lord, was most probably (indeed,

[1] The construction is an unusual one: ὧν τε ὀφθήσομαί σοι, *de quibus tibi porro apparebo*, "*that which* (or in which) I will appear to thee, will be seen of thee."

we naturally presuppose it) the voice of *God*, that is, of the Son; comp. ver. 28. Soon after, we find that to St Paul also the Lord spake in a vision *by night*, chs. xviii. 9, xxiii. 11, although in the second passage it is added, "The Lord *stood* by him." All these expressions are carefully adjusted by the Spirit's inspiration, through the instrumentality of the careful investigation of the historian, St Luke. We see that in the period of the Acts of the Apostles there is always something *personal* in the appearance and speaking of the Lord, though with a gradually increasing mediateness, and decreasing directness. *These* words of our Lord Jesus from heaven—that is, in the apostolical narrative—we have already, for the most part, expounded in "The Discourses of the Apostles,"[1] and must therefore take the liberty of repeating more or less literally what has been there said, though with such modifications as our present scope and object requires.

Passing over the Epistles, the glorified bodily exhibition of the Son of Man appears once more to return, and still more fully and majestically, at the end of the New Testament to St John, Rev. i. 11, etc. This is, in a certain sense, the case; yet it is also in contrast with the first manifestation to St Paul, inasmuch as St John was *in the Spirit* when he heard the Lord's voice and saw his visions, but Saul was most assuredly not "in the Spirit" near Damascus. Yet that which is heard in the Spirit is not, on that account, the less actual; only through such a medium was it possible to look into the depths of heaven, and hear the words of the Lord from the *throne*.

Between the Acts of the Apostles and the Revelation of St John, we find once the definite expression, "*The Lord*, after I had supplicated Him, *said unto me*" (2 Cor. xii. 9). We receive this literally as it stands; and regard it as a sufficient example of many instances in which the Lord may have spoken to His people in words of comfort and exhortation, audible in the Spirit! We by no means deny that the same takes place in the present day; on the contrary, it is our confident assurance that it does.

Finally, as it regards the *Revelation of St John*, after the first most personal and emphatically impressive appearance of

[1] Or, *Andeutungen für gläubiges Schriftverständniss, dritte und vierte Sammlung.*

the Living One, who was dead and now liveth for evermore, the style of the vision passes over into the language of figure and symbol, corresponding, indeed, but not directly so, to realities. The voices of the angels, of the elders, of the living creatures, of the martyrs and overcomers, of the saved, of all creatures, are all assuredly a succession of revelations and sayings of the Lord Himself, mediated by the prophetic Spirit; but this belongs to a mysterious domain, on the borders of which our humble little work pauses in silence. But we must assert an exception for those revelations which occur on the shadowy threshold, and which directly continue the solemn character of personal manifestation stamped upon the first appearance of the Lord in this book. We shall, therefore, expound the Seven Epistles of chs. ii. and iii., in which the Lord, who comes upon the scene in ch. i., speaks on without interruption, *uttering*, with His lofty *I*, to the churches throughout, what He commands His servant to *write* to them. Then we shall consider that brief word of the same original voice, ch. x. 1. And, finally, the most sublime *conclusion* of all the Lord's sayings, the word from the *Throne*, ch. xxi. 5–8; from which the passages of ch. xxii. are essentially distinguished, notwithstanding the "I Jesus," ver. 16. Here the Lord enters as the speaker, after the figurative manner of the ancient prophetical Scriptures, to which this last prophetical book, with its New Testament contents, returns.

We remark that the only words recorded as spoken from heaven were addressed to the three great Apostles, *Paul*, *Peter*, and *John;* the only exception being the words spoken to Ananias, and recorded for the sake of St Paul. St Peter retreats most into the background, with his single "voice"; St Paul receives the most direct and impressive manifestations; but St John is favoured with the *profoundest* and most far-reaching utterances which the Lord, who is the Spirit, had to say to the churches, and is still ever saying to them by His servant, the bosom-disciple.

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I.

TO SAUL THE PERSECUTOR.

(Acts ix. 4–6—xxii. 7–10—xxvi. 14–16.)

THRICE in the course of the brief Acts of the Apostles is this most important revelation of our Lord described; as if to warn our ignorance not too swiftly to dispatch it, and not too hastily to assume its right interpretation attained. But, instead of taking this hint, the fond ignorance of too many has occupied itself with detecting contradictions in the threefold narrative, and with drawing its own foolish conclusions from those contradictions. As if St Luke did not himself best know, with his "perfect understanding of all things from the very first," that which he recorded in different parts of his book, with a designed variation. In ch. ix. he himself relates the occurrence as a historian, but obviously with the same regard to brevity of delineation, seizing only and giving prominence to the critical points, which the necessity of his work imposed upon him throughout; and, moreover, with the intention in reserve to add further particulars in due course. For, he has further to give two leading examples, in chs. xxii. and xxvi., of the manner in which the Apostle himself, never weary of the repetition, was wont to relate this experience, as the ground, again and again to be made valid, of his whole announcement from his Master. That there exists some variety in the relation and expression is perfectly natural:—is it reasonable to require that the Apostle should have everywhere given the same stereotyped account? Of the external transaction we shall speak hereafter; we confine ourselves now to a preliminary view of the *words* of our Lord, which, in their measured exactness, were thus word for word spoken, but the literal repetition of which St Luke appropriately leaves to the relating Apostle. Before the exasperated

Jewish people, he gives prominence, for instance, to the expression by which the Lord described Himself, and which wa peculiarly appropriate to these scorners and persecutors—I am Jesus *of Nazareth!* Further, He makes the command express, —"Go into *Damascus*," instead of "into the city." But who needs to know which of these two was actually spoken? He proceeds, "it shall be told thee of all things which are *appointed* for thee to do," instead of "what thou *shalt* do." Again afterwards before the *Roman* Governor, and the last so-called *King of the Jews*, the Apostle makes it significantly emphatic that the Lord spake in the *Hebrew tongue*. On the former occasion, on the stairs of the castle, the Apostle himself had spoken in the Hebrew; but now, speaking Greek, he naturally mentions this circumstance. The word concerning "kicking against the pricks" (which in the first narrative is a false reading, interpolated from ch. xxvi.), had primary reference only to the Apostle's own person and conscience; it might, therefore, be omitted, as unnecessary, when speaking to the mass of the people. But, addressed to Agrippa, pierced in conscience, perplexed, and wavering, as he was (comp. ch. xxvi. 28), it had a peculiarly appropriate force. Finally, we shall see that St Paul, in his rapid narrative, ch. xxvi. 16, connects with the Lord's last word outside Damascus a compendious statement of a subsequent appearance and commission.

After having thus, for the sake of those to whom it is necessary, paused so long at the threshold, let us now enter the sanctuary of the *first* word of Jesus from heaven! The first word it assuredly *is*. Stephen, before he fell under the stones of the murderers of the Just One, had *seen* heaven opened and Jesus at the right hand of God (*standing*, too, as if rising to greet and receive him); but His *words* the Lord had reserved for Saul. This, well considered, leads to some important reflections. The appeal of Jesus to His persecutor is, as the first word from heaven, so characteristically significant, and so full of symbolical meaning, that we cannot bring ourselves to think of it as other than the first. It may, indeed, be suggested that our Lord's voice had probably been heard in the answers to His people's prayers. It has been even inferred from the "familiar manner in which Ananias, as one not unaccustomed to receive communications from his Lord," makes objection to

the evil reputation of Saul, that that disciple must have spoken with Jesus before this occasion. But this is only a specious argument; the familiarity of prayer would have begotten this confidence, and we must remember the "vision," in which man approaches nearer and less reservedly to God. Suffice, that we may justly regard this as the Lord's first opening His mouth in audible words since His ascension.

The narrative thrice begins with "light shining round about from heaven"; in ch. xxii. it is a "great light";[1] and in ch. xxvi., still more emphatically, "above the brightness of the sun". If the face of Jesus shone *as* the sun upon the Mount of Transfiguration, must not the first beaming forth of His heavenly *glory* be still more dazzling? This in broad noon-day was something more than the glory which shone round the shepherds on the holy night of the Incarnation; it was a shining forth, though still bedimmed for mortal eye, of *that* light in which God dwelleth, and in which the God-man now dwelleth also.

But this light shines only that it may call light out of the darkness of a rebellious sinner's heart; in order to the revelation of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face, that is, in the *person* of Jesus Christ. And who is it that first encounters this light, with its sudden and marvellous conviction? The man who had been marked out to that end by God's good pleasure from his mother's womb, the chosen *Paul!* This single name sets before us the whole man, the elect instrument, the great Apostle *of the Gentiles* (although Samaria and the Ethiopian eunuch had already heard the Word, and Peter in the house of Cornelius will make the first evident beginning)—the mighty champion and labourer, who laboured more than they all. We cannot agree with the view—pushed to its extreme by Baumgarten—which sets the Gentile Apostolate, thus introduced, over against the Israelite Twelve. For this we find no sure foundation in Scripture; but it was undoubtedly a great and new thing, that such a blasphemer and persecutor should be made a witness for the Lord. He was not, however, a thirteenth Apostle of a new and distinct order for the Church of the Gentiles; the Twelve were themselves sent forth into all the world, and unto all the nations; and even the New Jerusalem, Rev. xxi. 14, knows

[1] In the Greek, *ἱκανόν*, an expression familiar to St Luke.

only the Twelve Apostles *of the Lamb* (not *of Israel*). But he was that other, already prophesied of in Ps. cix. 8, whom the Lord Himself—in opposition to the premature, uncommanded, and therefore invalid human choice (Gal. i. 1) of Matthias—reserved to be appointed in place of the traitor Judas. The latter was a representative and forerunner of the Jewish people, which rejected Jesus; the former was a type and first-fruit of the Jews who were to be converted, and many of whom were converted even in his missionary labours among the Gentiles. What a man, and what a position in the kingdom of God assigned to him—condescended to, and won, and prepared in so wonderful a manner! First, he receives this revelation as the representative of all the Jews of that time who, under all their disguise of enmity, were yet *susceptible of grace*. Then, as the witness to all men (Acts xxii. 15; Col. i. 18), who should, with that same useful human learning which in itself he knew how to despise and reject, abase the lofty ones of this world before the knowledge of God in Christ (2 Cor. x. 5); who should be a founder of systematic doctrine in the Church, so far as the Church would need such system—thus standing between the practical Peter, and the mystical, consummating John. Finally, as one whose immediate call from above should vindicate, for all futurity, the Lord's supreme right to establish new beginnings of regimen; to raise up a reforming Apostolate without succession, to be renewed at His own good pleasure when circumstances may require.

But the first point which here offers itself to our attention is this, that it is an enemy and a persecutor who receives the *first* condescending *word* from the merciful High Priest in heaven. Not only will He not cast out any that come to Him—but He Himself seeks and finds, in all ages, His lost and wandering sheep. Thus He transforms the enemy into a witness and follower, whose personality, beyond that of any other, sets before us the idea and the reality of the discipleship of Christ (1 Cor. xi. 1). Millions have felt and are feeling that, especially through the life of this Paul, so copiously unfolded in Scripture, life in Christ and Christ Himself are most blessedly and mightily brought home to them. The Lord prepared him for Himself and His purposes, out of a Saul 'breathing out threatenings and slaughters against His saints!' Thus

His first personal speaking manifestation gives us a pledge of that ruling in which the King's sharp arrows pierce the *hearts* of His enemies (as the original of Ps. xlv. runs), and in which He takes the strong for His own prey. And it is a warning against that premature judgment of unbelievers and the condemned, into which our harshness or our despondency may mislead us. There were many Judases in Israel; but only upon one did Jesus pronounce the definitive sentence. So there were many Sauls converted, although their conversion has not been revealed to us. The Lord reminds us here of Thomas, but a greater than Thomas is here. It is thus that the great Apostle understands the significance of his own person and life, when he says at the end, "Therefore I obtained mercy, that in me *first of all*, Jesus Christ might shew forth all patience, for an example to those who should believe on Him unto eternal life;" 1 Tim. i. 16.

But when we refer the words to our Lord Himself, something much higher and deeper than anything we have yet said rises out of them. He has testified from heaven the identity of His *glorified* person with the "Jesus of Nazareth," just as the risen Lord had testified on earth, "It is I myself!" But that is the lesser testimony; and *before* He utters the exalted "I am Jesus", He has said, "*Why persecutest thou Me*"? that is, "*Me in my followers, in my Church*". Thus does He, even in His glory, identify Himself with His persecuted Church, with His scorned and outraged brethren; sitting already upon the throne as King, He as it were repeats, confirms, enlarges, and consummates the word spoken in His final prophecy of the judgment, concerning what is done to His brethren, Matt. xxv. 40–45; sealing, even for His saints *in persecution*, the close of His great prayer, which He uttered while yet in the flesh—"I in them"! John xvii. 26. *That* is the *first* word from heaven; and it is itself like a flash of lightning into the midst of the world's sin and confusion, dividing asunder, in the most effectual manner, the persecutor and the persecuted.

Suddenly—so we read in two accounts. Here falls the corner-stone from heaven into the persecutor's path, but crushes him not. Saul is struck and held back in the mad course of his zeal. Armed with the authority of the high council, he would push the persecution of the Christians, already begun, into

strange cities. Not certain that he might find any of "the way" (of righteousness and of salvation, the way of the Lord; see chs. xvi. 17, xviii. 25, xix. 9—but which he thought the perishable way of error), he, nevertheless, sets out to seek them, wherever they might be, and bind them. Assuredly, he was chosen in the eternal counsel; to this end he was, on the ground of his personality, as created of God, framed and prepared; and in the process of his life led onward to meet the vocation which was now to be received. Assuredly, as the Lord Himself says here to him and to us, he was already secretly in his conscience laid hold on; he was generally no hypocrite, like the whited walls in opposition to whom he can speak of himself, in ch. xxiii., as having a good conscience in his great delusion. But, therefore, now he is suddenly seized from above with more urgent might by grace; for *now* there is certainly in him no conscious preparation or susceptibility, but the perfect opposite. There is no doubt of conscience moving him; it is simply his purpose and burning desire to punish the heretics; and what could, in this career, lay him low, and turn him round, but the seeing and hearing of the Just One, whom he was persecuting? His powerful nature needed a powerful assault; and, behold, for such a nature, the Lord has such dealings in store. The risen Lord was ready to suffer Himself to be touched by Thomas; and the exalted Lord is not too high to condescend to Saul—and make of him a Paul.

That which the Apostle, in ch. xxii. 6, introduces with a simple and sublime, "And it came to pass," was not an internal process, perceptible only to his own spirit: this is proved by what his companions experienced. According to ch. ix. 7, they *heard* a voice, but saw *no man;* according to ch. xxii. 9, they saw the *light*, but heard not the voice of *Him that spake.* This variation of expression implies no contradiction; any more than that, according to ch. ix. 7, they stood, and according to ch. xxvi. 14, fell to the earth also. For, to clear up the last first, ch. xxvi. relates that which befell all before the voice; but ch. ix. records that, *after* the voice, the attendants had naturally lifted themselves up and were standing before Saul did so. Similarly, they saw and heard something, but with only half perception; they received the indefinite impression of a light and a sound: comp. John xii. 28, 29, and something similar,

though in a different order, Dan. x. 7. The whole, if we combine it in one, means this: They *saw*, indeed, the dazzling light, but *no man*, that is, no form and manifested person; they *heard*, indeed, the sound as of a loud voice, but they heard not and understood not what was *said*.

We read in ch. xxvi. of the flash, that it "shone round about," as in Luke ii. 9, concerning the shepherds of Bethlehem; but in chs. ix. and xxii. there is a stronger word—literally, *lightened around*—and to this belongs the "suddenly" which in Luke ii. 13 (it is the same Greek word) is afterwards added. Saul fell down immediately, struck by the awe of the brilliance above the light of the sun at noonday, with the others to the earth.[1] So he heard the words; they were for him alone. *That* was the fitting place for the proud man; there, cast down in his prostrate impotence and wretchedness, unable to bear the glance of heaven, the voice which he hears seizes him—that is, not as speaking by his side upon the earth, but as *from heaven*, like the light, coming in its direction from above. And even so he had seen the form of the Speaker in his first terror as above him; not as one afterwards standing upon the earth.

Or did he only hear, and *not* see the form and countenance of the Lord? So many think; and they seemingly have the superficially understood and isolated expression in their favour. But the contrast with the attendants, who saw no man, ch. ix. 7, itself gives us to understand that Saul had seen *some one*. Ananias, however, speaks decisively—Jesus, who *appeared unto thee* (Gr. was seen of thee); so Barnabas, ver. 27, relates to the Apostles that Saul had *seen* the Lord in the way, and spoken with Him; finally, ch. xxii. 14 speaks not of a future seeing and hearing, but of what had already taken place. Consequently, St Luke relates partially, at the first, reserving the rest for his future account; he conceals the mystery of the seeing and hearing, as it were, in this place; laying the emphasis upon the *words* of the Lord, without which the seeing would have been only a stunning amazement. But it is obvious that *suddenly*—with the first flash of light—Saul had also seen the form and the countenance of the Lord. Indeed, the

[1] Scarcely from his horse, as the painters depict it: it would rather be from his ass, but even that is only probable. Such circumstances are not recorded, as having nothing to do with the matter.

overpowered and down-stricken persecutor did not look up again at the Speaker; but he, nevertheless (and this is another proof), *recognised*, in His subsequent manifestations, the Lord whom he had first seen.

And Jesus *speaks* to him in the *Hebrew tongue:* but this does more than merely define the sensibly heard speech, in opposition to the inward speaking of the spirit, which suggests thoughts without words. The Hebrew tongue belongs to the identity of the Person, who used this language upon earth—but neither is this enough. What the Hellenized and Romanised Jewish King Agrippa—to whom St Paul expressly mentioned it—may have thought about that circumstance, puts us on the right track:—it involves the abiding recognition of the first-chosen people of Israel, and the prophetic word given to them first *in the sacred tongue;* the prophecy of a return of this people, and of a final full solution and comprehension of the ancient Scriptures; all this is testified to us in the Lord's speaking here in the Hebrew tongue. For, if it is objected that this "Hebrew" was only the common Jewish tongue then spoken, and not the language of the Old-Testament Scripture—it may be replied that the two are inseparable in their significance; as we know that the Saviour upon the Cross uttered the language of the Psalm in the Syro-Chaldaic version of it. And now, at length, after all this introduction and preparation, let us hear the *words* themselves, which the voice of Him who was seen in the first moment of his amazement spake to the persecutor prostrate upon the ground.

SAUL! SAUL! WHY PERSECUTEST THOU ME? The mention of his name indicates and seizes the whole inner man, as he was. We often fail to understand, through all our life, our own name, especially when the world has prefixed all kinds of titles to it; but when *God* calls a man by his name, the true form, character, and spirit of the man is laid bare before the light of His countenance. And here the Lord, whom, as the glorified Son of God, the little company of His worshippers addressed already before the Pentecost as "knowing all hearts", utters into the heart and conscience of Saul a word of thunder, following the glance of lightning, which rent all the vestments of his disguise. If in this thunder, which began his awakening by fear, there was a prelude of the final judgment, when every

man will be called by his name, there was also something more than that—a transition to mourning in the awful accusation, to that appeal and invitation of troubled love which is plainly heard in the following question. This calling by name from heaven is more mighty and impressive than when upon earth the Lord, who knew what was in man, uttered His "Zaccheus!" or "Simon, Simon!" or "Martha, Martha!" We do not read of any other enemy or unbeliever addressed by name, excepting the Pharisee Simon, Luke vii. 40, whom His grace was by that very address really approaching, and *Judas*, still recognised as a former "friend" and companion, even in the hour of His betrayal. There may be a very little of this same judicial tone of holy love—which endures the wrong, but assigns the fearful guilt to him who offers it—in this appeal to Saul. But, at the same time, the *double* call—which not merely deepens its emphasis, but, as we prefer to think, already begins to descend from majesty to mildness, from accusation to lament—has something in it, though of a higher order, like the call which aroused the hostess in Bethany from her household distraction: "I have somewhat to say unto thee! Awake up from the distracting tumult of thy persecution!" And the majesty and might of condescending love gains its end. The *first* open word of the *risen* Lord (which was preceded by the gentle consolatory preparation of a disguised voice), was also a call by name—*Mary!* Yet how different, with all its resemblance, is the first call of the *ascended* Lord!

Let it not be wondered at that we speak here—upon the first words of His mouth—of the soul-affecting *tone* of the speech of the exalted Redeemer, speaking down to man upon earth. That He still has a mouth to speak, and may make His words heard, though no longer after the earthly manner of the organs which form the utterance here; that He may thus communicate His will—at least as certainly as Almighty God could speak from heaven, "I am the Lord!" "Thou art My beloved Son!"—is self-understood. Or, rather, it ought to be rightly understood by all believers who think soundly about what they believe. Gess justly complains that theology speaks almost always only of corporeity, when treating of the permanent humanity of the glorified Christ; and says that[1] "the humanity

[1] In the memorable book, "Die Lehre von der Person Christi," s. 266.

must exist as certainly in the *inner nature* of the exalted Saviour; even as upon earth His was not merely a human *bodily* life, but also a human *life of the soul*" (Heb. iv. 15; John v. 27). This belongs, indeed, to the least understood and doubtless most difficult problems of knowledge; but it is indubitably true, nevertheless. Consequently, how mysterious soever the connection mediated by Almightiness, between the audible speaking and the corporeity of Jesus, may be—there is a profounder connection with His abiding personality in this, that the voice proceeds from His soul, we would rather say, from His *heart;* and carries with it "in the manner of a man who in degree is the Lord God" (1 Chron. xvii. 17), the most living and impressive expression.

And now for the more plain and direct *question*, which unfolds the charge already involved in the invocation by name. The whole internal contradiction of *this* more sincere Pharisee against the neglected voice of God's truth, is now condensed and condemned in one short word—*Why persecutest thou Me?* As it was the Lord's wont upon earth to pierce the hearts of the people by *questions*, humbling and judging them by asking them questions which would lay bare their conduct to themselves, so it is here—though now in its heavenly effect the question is still more powerful. He utters only a few plain words (in the Hebrew only two)—such is the sublime heavenly majesty of His style from the throne. To every lower or higher questioner who might have asked—Wherefore persecutest thou the Nazarenes? Saul would have been ready with many reasons of conscience and duty to justify himself; but here he can only reply by an humbled and amazed question, which seems already almost to know the Lord—Who art thou? Into the secret depth of his conscience, where man is found guilty even in his sins of ignorance, the fearful interrogatory penetrates and sticks fast—*What*, for what, or *wherefore* persecutest thou Me?

How wonderful, for inexhaustible contemplation of the detail in the whole, and of the whole in the detail, is everything which is recorded in Scripture concerning the great acts and words of God! The individualities are so concrete and historical, the words are so simple in their immediate place and connection, that a hundred expositors may fail to discern in them

anything specific to expound; but, in the comprehensive view of the whole in Scripture, the genuine *scripture*-expositor finds ever something new, everywhere something great and significant even in the lesser matters. So is it with this *first* word of the Lord from heaven—the first word since the farewell words before the ascension. He, the same who testified that to Him was given all power in heaven and on earth, testifies here in the first testimony that He bears from the throne of His omnipotence, that He will not use this power in judgment; yea, that He will not use it for the mere external defence of His Church. He confesses to his persecuted members and brethren; but He Himself *endures persecution* in them, and will win the persecutor, whom He has borne with in long-suffering, only by the violence of love! His power will make him a disciple in no other way than that appointed in Matt. xxviii. 19 for all people. This is also the consolation for all the persecuted, in all the future of the kingdom of the cross; until that day when He will come in another form from heaven, and speak and judge in another style. Where the Lord cannot turn His enemies, and when He does not restrain, but suffers them to do their violence to *Himself* in His people—His people may confidently say, "He beareth it; let us bear it too!" As the Lord in His humiliation, at the beginning of His bodily indignities, uttered but one word, as suitable for the whole passion—Why smitest thou Me? (John xviii. 23,) while He suffered himself to be beaten, and scourged, and put to death—so here the exalted Lord patiently, and with the chastisement of gracious truth alone, cries, with reference to all His future enemies to the end of the world—Why persecutest thou Me? Pre-eminently, and first of all, this word was meant for blinded Israel, who afterwards received the same words from the Apostle in all their force, Acts xxii.

With this all-embracing brevity did St Luke record it at first, and similarly the Apostle before all the people in Jerusalem. But, on the second defence before Agrippa, where he more confidentially and fully opens the mystery of his conversion, he communicates what the Lord proceeded to add—IT IS HARD FOR THEE TO KICK AGAINST THE PRICKS. This expression is an agricultural proverb, used of the yoked oxen which, in their stupidity, kick out against the goad furnished with a sharp point, and injure themselves the more. Thus

it simply means—vainly and foolishly to oppose a superior power, to one's own injury. The proverb occurs in Latin and Greek authors; the tragic poets use it of impotent opposition to the gods; the Syrians appear also to have had such a phrase, and thus it became known probably to the Hebrews; at any rate it was known to Saul, who was versed in foreign literature; but we would not go so far as to say that the Lord had this in mind, speaking to Saul as a learned man. For, the Hebrew words proceed simply onwards; they only lay open more plainly, and more condescendingly, and in their progression more piercingly, that which was already contained in the depths of the previous word, and its sublime antithesis—Why persecutest *thou*—*Me?* That which the question had pressed upon the *conscience* is now brought out into full prominence for the *understanding*—far too powerful for thee! Moreover, the folly and the guilt is laid bare, which would proudly defend itself against this already felt inferiority of power.

While we are dwelling upon the circumstance that our Lord not only spoke in the Hebrew tongue, but also condescended to speak to men in their own proverbial expressions, infusing into them a new meaning, it is important that we should penetrate into the specific and new meaning which the present proverb derives from His use of it. The scruple might be raised—Did Saul already kick against the pricks when he was persecuting Jesus, whom he did not as yet know as the Mighty One in heaven? But it may be answered that the sinner who had fought in his blindness against the power, righteousness, and truth of God, must have assuredly marked and discerned the high *authority* against which he in his vain folly was struggling, although he did not as yet plainly see *who* wielded the sceptre; that, consequently, warning thrusts must have already reached the conscience of Saul, as generally from the justice of God, so specifically from the bright self-attestation of the angel-countenance of Stephen, and the undeniable sanctity of the persecuted "saints"—warnings which, however half-unconsciously, must yet have have been certainly *felt*. Few Nazarenes had blasphemed; most of them confessed, even amid torments, the name which he fought against; yea, this hated and persecuted *name* approved itself, in its living wonderful power, as the staff of a superior against the prick of which he vainly kicked, only

the more wounding his own mind and conscience thereby. The Lord does not merely "testify to him the objective fruitlessness of his opposition to the *Church*" (as Schaff thinks)—that was already contained in the revelation of His heavenly power and glory; but that which in Saul's person (subjectively) had made itself felt *as his own hurt*, felt actually as the rebuking point of a goad nevertheless urged against him—*that* the Lord now suddenly reveals to him, and throws light at once upon the past: "Why persecutest thou Me, and thereby essentially only *thyself?*" But, from that great moment when this rises distinctly before his consciousness, it receives the stronger and fuller meaning for the future also: "Wouldst thou further oppose—think how hard, vain, and ruinous it will be *to thee!*" Luther has given rightly the sense of the indefinite word—It *will be* hard to thee. "Behold, this is My goad—dost thou feel it? Wilt thou further deny thyself to Me? or, wilt thou obediently draw in my yoke, yield thyself up submissively to be sent in My service? My sacred grace hath decreed to make thee obedient—Woe, woe, unto thee, if thou shouldst not follow! *Hard* should it be to thee, incomparably harder than hitherto:"—this and this only the Lord says; for *impossible* Saul's disobedience was not even now; of an irresistible grace we can by no means think. (Comp. ch. xxvi. 19, and Gal. i. 16.)

Satisfied with this exposition of the words, as it has always with more or less clearness been perceived, we do not think it necessary to turn aside to any profound concomitant meaning; such as that, for instance, of Baumgarten, who refers the whole saying only to the Pharisee's, afterwards the Apostle's, warfare with the *law*.[1] Otherwise, he needlessly objects, the figure, when applied to Saul's past and future relation to Jesus, would be inappropriate, as making Jesus the driver with a threatening goad, and Paul the ox performing his work from fear alone! For, does not the Lord here manifestly *show* Himself—previously to all else that would afterwards follow—as the Mighty One, with the staff of authority, pointed with the prick which should pierce the conscience? And does not the figure approve its truth in this, that the question is one of the *yoke* of obedi-

[1] In harmony with his general view that "all the thoughts which agitated the mind of Saul, in consequence of the Lord's address to him, must have centred in the Law"—against which Lechler rightly protests.

ence? Thus it is, quite simply, that the Lord testifies *His own* power, the opposition to which can result only in the hurt of him who opposes; but, because this power, before as hereafter, is the power of patient love, He testifies further that the goad of the driver is the staff of the Good Shepherd, having no other design than to take away the sin, through grace which rigorously and zealously seeks to effect its purpose. The holy Theresa finely said (as Gossner quotes): "Lord, I sooner became weary of injuring Thee, than Thou of forgiving my injury"—but it might have been substituted—"than Thou of withstanding, in order that Thou mightest be able to forgive."

All this Paul shortly afterwards well understood. But in the first shock of sudden amazement, the whole saying, despite the final penetrating clause, was almost unintelligible. He feels and suspects, but does not at once clearly understand; hence, in his deep presentiment, he utters the hasty question, *Who art Thou, Lord?* For he had, hitherto, persecuted Jesus ignorantly in unbelief (1 Tim. i. 13)—it had not been his purpose to fight wilfully against God. If, on the instant after the manifestation (which it was impossible for him to continue gazing at), he could hardly think otherwise than that it was Jehovah Himself in the glory of His revelation (the *Shekinah*, according to the Jewish expression), or at least an angel in human form, who, in the name and authority of Jehovah, called him,—yet the "Me" was, for the moment, incomprehensible; and in that his relative innocence, in connection with his guilt, revealed itself. Had the Lord appeared to any of those who said, "This is the heir, come let us kill him!" it would have fallen upon him as the thunder of judgment; at most, he would have been able to cry with the devils, "What hast thou to do with me, Jesus, Thou Son of the Most High God? Art Thou come to torment me before the time?" But Saul, who had not wilfully or consciously persecuted the Messiah, or the Person who might be the Messiah, can, lying upon the ground with covered face, find strength to utter his trembling question, "*Lord*, who sayest that I persecute thee, *Who* art thou? *Not* the God of Israel, *for* whose honour I thought myself zealous. Who art thou, O heavenly One, who thus art one with the *Nazarenes*, as if thou sufferedst in their sufferings?" But this very thought leads us to the other side of the question—that

the *presentiment* of his question needed only to be brought out and fully uttered, in order to find, if the Lord had kept silence, its own answer—"Thou art Jesus of Nazareth!" He knew so much, at least, of "this sect," that according to their belief Jesus was now enthroned in heaven. Therefore, while he might have thought and said, Who art thou, Lord, from heaven, *whom I can have persecuted?* he restrains this last, because that itself would instantly give him the answer, before the Lord, confirming his own thoughts, expressly uttered it.[1]

I AM JESUS OF NAZARETH, WHOM THOU PERSECUTEST! Who other than He whom thou hast persecuted? The Lord does not harshly break off—"Tarry thou on the ground, and reflect; this first word is enough for thee!" With more and more gracious condescension, He enters into the ordinary colloquy of word and answer. First comes the specific repetition and emphasis of his own word, Whom *thou* persecutest! although this comes out only after, in the first part of the sentence, it had been hinted at. The Lord now calls Himself from heaven by the name which the Spirit since the day of Pentecost had glorified, and by which the angels at the empty sepulchre had called Him (Mark xvi. 6): the name of humiliation, under which Saul had persecuted Him, is by Him in His glory retained and confirmed. Jesus of *Nazareth!* That further testifies, in the most solemn manner, the identity of His present person with the person of the humbled One, even to the years of childhood at Nazareth, to which He looks back

[1] The question is here raised, whether Saul had not previously known Jesus, whether he had not seen Him in Jerusalem or elsewhere. This is quite possible in itself; but His present form would not at once recall any such acquaintance with His person. That in 2 Cor. v. 16, this acquaintance is meant, appears to us a very doubtful, indeed, an absolutely wrong exposition. For, first, the Apostle speaks there hypothetically—only putting a case; and then, to know *Christ*, *i.e.*, the Messiah (γινώσκειν), is something very different from having seen, and personally known, the human person. St Paul had formerly a blind Jewish knowledge and expectation of the (promised) Messiah, *after the flesh*, that is, "as the letter reveals Him to the natural understanding;" this he renounces as old and past, because he has found the true Christ in Jesus. Not, therefore, as G. Müller says, "the form of His humanity has vanished from my mind"—he would say something very different. Assuredly, in conclusion, He who appeared to him at Damascus connects His quite otherwise meant *I am Jesus!* not with any former knowledge of His person which Saul might have had.

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from the throne of God in eternal glory. Not "Jesus *the Christ*"—which was self-understood from the glorious appearance; as also that Saul had *persecuted* Jesus only as the Christ. But the Lord will not still further oppress the man lying in the dust, by the name of His might and dignity; He mildly descends to him, giving him courage and awakening his confidence in the midst of his punishment. For, the expression must have recalled to him that this "Jesus of Nazareth" was once upon earth the meek and lowly One, the Benefactor and Healer in His Divine power. Moreover, *Jesus* means, as all who afterwards heard the words would think with Saul, Helper and Saviour. Thus—"Why persecutest thou, poor sinner, the only Helper, who hath holpen so many and would help thee, who pierces with the goad only so long as He is opposed? Why wilt thou not let Me save thee and others?" The charge changes into a tender and sorrowful lamentation and complaint, once more just as in John x. 32. Thus the sin of Saul is forgiven, in the utterance of this holy name of Jesus, even while that sin is a second time mentioned. And that name comes first—"*I am Jesus* whom thou persecutest—only behold and hear Me now!" Thus will the Lord reveal to *every* Saul, who has denied Him in error that may be repaired, His *Jesus-name*, which is still above the name of Christ, and *in which* every knee shall bow.

Such gracious condescension has made it possible that Saul, seized and rendered obedient by this second appeal, should put the question, *Lord, what wilt Thou that I should do?* (ch. xx., shorter, *What must I do, Lord?*) He does not remain terrified and amazed by the thought of the twice-proclaimed persecution of this Lord now appearing to him, and cry in anguish—Alas, what *have I done!* For, only this manifestation was wanting to make him turn to his denied Lord, with as much decision as had been shown in his persecution, and ask what might be the will of the Lord whom he now knew. Although the bitter struggle was yet to come, there already flowed into his heart a first breath of consolation and forgiveness; so that he looks forward, forgetting the things behind, and can offer himself and his whole life to Him whom he had persecuted, with the question, almost childlike in its confidence—What is Thy will from this time, O Lord, now even *my Lord? From this time*

—this has to him, now, the first and most pressing significance; because he is at the gate of Damascus, as a persecutor sent by the council: "What shall I do now? Shall I turn back? And whither? Shall I go on? And *what* to do then?"

Entering graciously into this, and bringing the affecting conversation nearer to its end, *the Lord* answers him:—St Paul, in the narrative before the Jews, ch. xxii., first acknowledges Him by *this name*. ARISE AND GO INTO THE CITY, AND IT SHALL BE TOLD THEE WHAT THOU MUST DO (ch. xxii., INTO DAMASCUS—OF ALL THINGS WHICH ARE APPOINTED FOR THEE TO DO. Ch. xxvi., RISE AND STAND UPON THY FEET). The first words, *Arise!* (hence quoted more emphatically in ch. xxvi.; comp. Ezek. ii. 1) has here great significance, much more than when it formerly came from the lips of Jesus. The voice of the Lord first threw him to the earth, it now lifts him up again—both, in this extraordinary revelation of His power, in quick succession. "*Go*—the same way which thou wast going, into the same Damascus, but as another man now, who hast fallen down before Me, and art risen up again! Thou shalt *at once do* something; I take thee at thy word, it is My *will*. Much is *appointed* to thee, yea, according to eternal counsel, *to thee*, the persecutor and blasphemer, which thou shalt do in thy new life, in thy new energy, in My service —*all this* will be told thee. The supreme order is given and sealed; but all the rest My ministers will care for." What an explanation this, leaving so much to be supposed, but concealing all in a simple word, which Saul could not at once understand.

Damascus, the oldest city of which we have any knowledge—mentioned as early as the history of Abraham, afterwards the metropolis of the enemies of Israel, and, later, of the fanatical Mohammedan power—was foreappointed to be the scene of a mighty testimony of Jesus Christ (see Acts ix. 20, 21). But the Lord does not say, as afterwards to Ananias, and as the angel to Cornelius—Into this or that street, into this or that house. He mentions to him no name. He begins at once to exercise him by the test of obedience in faith. He who had asked, in harmony with his impetuous character, what new thing he should *do*, is required, in this new beginning, to *wait*, to *learn*, to *be told*. He does not know that the fulfilment will

take place as soon as it actually did; he must first in silent waiting turn to account that which had already occurred. The origina. does not say, *One* will tell thee; but still more indefinitely, It shall be told thee. By whom? Might it be by the Lord Himself? The dismissing reference to some one *in the city* gives him plainly to understand that that cannot be meant. Thus it was by men, and by whom but by some of those disciples of the Lord whom he had come to persecute? Even Christ Himself points to His witnesses, as the angel referred Cornelius to Peter. Not merely, "He that persecuteth Mine persecuteth Me," but also, "He that heareth *Mine* heareth Me!"

As the Lord had in the first word confessed His *people*, so He confesses them now in the closing word. This expression is better here, and less easily perverted, than the too favourite word *church*; for where was at that time the church—as the term is now used distinctively from the congregation—with its confirmed, appointed, ruling constitution? The convert is afterwards directed to the *Scripture*, but that does not come till after: first he must have living intercourse with those who live in faith, in order to the opening of his eyes.

He is sent to one or to some of the *disciples* in Damascus—thus much he understands—whom he must patiently wait for. Let it be observed, not to the Apostles; for he is immediately called to be an Apostle himself. Nevertheless, he must subject himself to the heretics whom he had before scorned; he must bow down before the persecuted congregation, and receive from them the further communications of his Lord's will. Thus the extraordinary and miraculously-begun work of his conversion must have a regular and unmiraculous issue; the miracle is reduced back to ordinary limitations; the common order is placed on a level with the miraculous, rather it is confirmed and sanctified in its place above it. Thus, finally, the special honour done, as it were, to the proud Pharisee, is compensated or paralleled by his taking his place below the despised Nazarenes, in order to strengthen and maintain his humility. For, alas! not every one who has bowed down before the Lord Himself, submits to bow down before men for the Lord's sake, and before the Lord in the person of men.

The Lord often thus makes His own beginning, while He leaves the prosecution to His disciples. Thus He still greets

His children upon earth with greeting which strengthens their faith, while He commits to them still sometimes a captive enemy—the strong and learned made blind and praying, for their further care and nourishment.

Finally, there is in the expression, "what is *appointed* to thee"—as we find it in the exacter record, ch. xxii.—a reference to the *Father*, precisely as in Matt. xx. 23. We must not understand merely "appointed *by Me;*" but the glorified Lord gives the glory to the Father; and the word of Ananias, ch. xxii. 14, coincides with this. In the later appearance, ch. xxvi. 16, the Lord Himself gives His *orders* to His servant and witness; but in the first announcement of Himself as "Jesus of Nazareth," so condescendingly lowly with all its majesty, He refers all at the conclusion to His God and Father:—All shall be said to thee by *men*, that is appointed for thee by *God*. For this is the confirmed and everlasting rule: whosoever asks his Lord in earnest what he should do, shall have in His ways a sure answer given him even through men.

II.

ANANIAS' COMMISSION.

(Acts ix. 10–16.)

AMONG the multitudes of Jews in Damascus (St Luke, in vers. 2 and 20, speaks of synagogues in the plural) there were disciples of Jesus of Nazareth (vers. 19–25),—though probably an insignificant little company. The persecution which Saul had with a strong hand undertaken in Jerusalem had far dispersed the persecuted, and sent them widely forth as preachers of the Word. But we must not think of any orderly ecclesiastical relation among these few disciples at Damascus, nor of any separation from the Jewish people, further than their confession of Jesus absolutely required. They remained, as we find it for a long time within Israel, Jews in all observance of the law. This is expressly stated, ch. xxii. 12, of *Ananias;* as also his good report, the consideration paid to his irreproachable, respectable character among all the Jews of the city, and

which his faith in Jesus had not yet interrupted. Consequently, although this "disciple" is not called an elder of the community, he is one in reality; and is chosen, as the worthiest representative of the discipleship in the place, to receive and admit Saul into the fellowship of Christians. But this transition from the miraculous to regular order requires also on the part of Ananias—in order that his mistrust of the persecutor may be taken away, and still more that he might enter fully into the Lord's plan and commission, and venture to approach Saul—a further extraordinary and miraculous intervention. It takes place, therefore, though in a lower degree; that is, by an appearance and communication of the Lord *in vision*.

This expression has here, as is obvious, not the general meaning which it has in Acts vii. 31, Matt. xvii. 9,[1] where it refers to an APPEARANCE from the other world in opposition to ordinary perception—in which sense Saul's seeing and hearing before Damascus was a vision. But it connects itself, according to a more restricted use of the phrase, with the Old Testament manner of speech, as found already in Acts ii. 17, in which the word of the Lord to Abraham (Gen. xv. 1) was heard "in a vision" in the night, as ver. 7 shows. The promise in the Prophet Joel (ch. iii. 1) mentions prophecy, dream, and vision as the three orders of Divine revelation; as in Num. xii. 6 the Lord declares that He will make Himself known to other prophets in vision or dream, but expressly distinguishes this from the immediate revelation reserved for Moses—the speaking face to face, the being seen in face or form. What the stricter relations of these may be is matter of higher experience, and cannot here be thoroughly opened up; we merely remark, that the very distinct dream might pass over into the vision, with a certain removal of the distinction, but that this distinction must be maintained in the case of a vision seen, as here, during the day. As Cornelius and Peter beheld their visions in the day and waking—although, in order to their susceptibility for the event, raised out of ordinary wakefulness—so most probably did Ananias here. It is not said—In a vision of *the night;* and, according to ver. 17, when he received the commission he went on the same day, without

[1] And differs in the Greek (ὀπτασία for ὅραμα, as in Acts xxvi. 19), yet with the same meaning in xxiv. 23.

interval or hesitation, to execute it. But, finally, it must not be overlooked that we do not read of his being *in the spirit;* this is a further distinction between these "visions" of the history of the Acts, and the later more profoundly internal intercourse of the Lord with His Apostles.

The Lord said in the vision, ANANIAS! Here once calling by name is enough; his name, uttered in so wonderful a manner, introduces the vision, excites and places him in a state in which there was certainly some kind of *seeing* the appearing Lord. For, on the one hand, the vision of Ananias would not be less plain than that of Saul, who *saw* this man coming in to him; and, on the other, St Luke relates the proceeding with the supposition, not expressed, that Ananias at the first call knew the Lord *Jesus*, and afterwards speaks to Him as such —"*Thy* saints, who call on *Thy* name." We cannot perfectly understand all; but this much is plain, that, without having any previous experience of any such vision, the faithful disciple, accustomed to the communion of the heart with his Lord, is raised from the sudden shock of the appearance to the confident beholding of Him who appears, and can reply, *Here am I, Lord!* It may be that Ananias was one of those who had seen the Lord in his visits to Jerusalem at the feasts—possible that he was one of His original disciples[1]—and consequently that the voice and form of the Lord would recall Him to his remembrance. Be that as it may, *this* vision and colloquy rests upon the same foundation as the revelation to Saul, confirmed and sealed as that is by an entire apostolical life.

In the "Here am I"—which occurs so often from Abraham in Gen. xx. downwards, as the reply to the Lord's summons by name, and the immediate use of which sprang from Ananias' familiarity with Scripture—was contained the questions, "What is Thy will? What am I to do?" And the Lord said to him, "ARISE, AND GO INTO THE STREET WHICH IS CALLED STRAIGHT, AND INQUIRE IN THE HOUSE OF JUDAS FOR ONE SAUL OF TARSUS." It is not that Ananias also had fallen down; the *arise* simply belong, in the familiar speech, to the going and executing his errand at once.[2] The Lord assumes

[1] Compare the expression, probably to be understood in the same way, concerning Mnason, an old disciple, ἀρχαίῳ μαθητῇ, Acts xxi. 16.

[2] In the Greek they are closely united, ἀναστὰς πορεύθητι.

the tone of familiar speech, as if all was passing in common life, and condescends to exact specification of the street and house; for this was now necessary, in order to give Ananias a distinct impression, and still more to obviate the premature comments which would have resulted from any particular inquiries in the city—"The Christian Ananias has sought out the persecutor Saul!" What the two have to do together requires at first perfect secrecy; until, after certain days (ver. 19), Saul begins, to the astonishment of all, to preach concerning Jesus in the synagogues. After Luther's inexact translation—die *richtige* Gasse—many have found a fanciful allusion to him who was now brought into the right way; but this disturbs *here* the plain simplicity of the whole, in which nothing more is meant than the great street of the city, so called in distinction from others which did not run so directly through it. The host *Judas* was not also a Christian, though through his guest he may have become one; the name here indicates only what we should now express by the number of the street. Because, finally, *Saul*, like *Judas*, was an ordinary name, the usual designation of Saul *of Tarsus* marks out one who in every land, and by Ananias, was known as the notorious enemy of the Christians.

Hitherto the words had been simple and plain, as when a man is introducing with accuracy an ordinary commission; but now comes the great declaration,—"FOR, BEHOLD, HE PRAYETH!" Here the *for* (which has been softened away by most expositors) retains its full meaning; the astonishment and affright of Ananias at the mention of the name *Saul of Tarsus* is anticipated—"Thou shalt seek him without fear; thou shalt find him willing to be told My will." In this Bengel is at fault, who refers the *for* (which obviously *gives a reason*) to the whole clause, and particularly to the following sentence about his having seen the vision. Surely the first words—*he prayeth!* were of themselves quite enough ground to establish the confidence of Ananias. The *behold!* places the praying man, visible to the Lord, also, as it were, before the eyes of Ananias. In that one thing everything is embraced and said! A *praying* man is never to be feared, has ceased to be an enemy and a persecutor—that is the first and most obvious meaning for Ananias; but it is very far from being all that the words contained. Instead of the external matter which St Luke,

ver. 9, faithfully recorded at first—"He was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank"—the Lord mentions that which He saw in the *inner man*, and which was only imaged and expressed in the blindness and fasting. What *prayer* must this of Saul have been, through these three days and nights! We cannot agree with Baumgarten, who maintains (against Bengel) that the state of Saul during the whole of the three days is not described as being that of prayer; but that "the praying put an end to the agony which had filled the three days!" This interpretation presses the *for* beyond its limits; since, in that case, if *the reason* for the Lord's commission to Ananias had occurred before, Ananias would have been sent earlier! We confess that we cannot understand a three days' "wrestling" on Saul's part, which was resolved at last into prayer—not being itself prayer all through. "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" *That*, in truth, was the beginning of a prayer to the Lord, which never could cease again until it had been fully answered. The other remark of Baumgarten is both obvious and true: "This was of course not the first time that Saul had prayed; as an irreproachable Pharisee he had never neglected the hours of devotion; but all his previous praying did not deserve the name." Ah, how often is it that, after much fruitful "prayer" which the Lord has not regarded, He Himself at length bears His testimony—Behold, he *prayeth* now!

"We cannot describe the whole way of conversion more concisely, and at the same time more comprehensively, than by these words—'Behold, he prayeth.' For it brings the two things together: that conversion is God's work; but that it must have our co-operation. In *prayer* we lay hold on God's good will, which had before laid hold upon us; and yield ourselves up to His mighty drawings" (Rieger). Saul, so mightily apprehended of Christ Jesus, had already a secret sense or hope of forgiveness; nevertheless, the appropriation of this pardon in faith required of him, now that calm reflection followed the great manifestation, the most vehement wrestling—the utmost labour of prayer, that in repentance he might surely taste the full knowledge of his sin. For, notwithstanding all that was sudden and extraordinary in his case, there was no remission or relaxation to him of the universal method of grace:—and this is emphatically stated in the mention of his prayer. The means

of grace for him, as for all others, are the *word* and *sacrament*—but deriving their energy and effect from *praying faith*, which receives in order to further seeking and finding.

"Behold, he prayeth"—that is the first and main point, as the verse divides itself; then follows, "AND HATH SEEN IN A VISION A MAN NAMED ANANIAS, COMING IN, AND PUTTING HIS HAND UPON HIM, THAT HE MIGHT RECEIVE HIS SIGHT." This corresponsive "vision" of a different order, similar to that of the man of Macedonia in Troas (ch. xvi. 9), the personification of the people crying for their only help, is, strictly speaking, no more in itself than that seeing from afar, or anticipatory seeing, what will afterwards take place, of which there are plentiful examples in all times. Only that the mention of the name (doubtless by a voice) is an unusual addition, for the purpose of directing both men certainly to each other, as in the case of Peter and Cornelius. One might say that the name would bear with it a consoling significance:—Ananias (like Hananiah, Johanan, Johannes) that is, "The Lord is gracious."[1] Yet, in any case, the vision of itself was without any concomitant *omen*, a comforting and gracious preparation of Saul for the peaceful consciousness of received grace; it promised him very much, as being a continuation of the Lord's intercourse with him—for only from Him could such revelation come; it was to him the beginning of the answer of his prayer, pointing him to the future appointed for him. For, if he should *see* again, it could be only that he might be restored to a new life and a new activity; that the same man Ananias would furthermore tell him what he should do, was taken for granted, and indeed symbolically declared in the opening of his eyes.[2] It is the manner of a *vision* to exhibit the external, from which the rest then follows; as we find also that the Lord only hints to *Ananias* his specific commission for Saul—at first merely by this laying on of hands, in order to his recovering sight. That which follows in ver. 15, 16, as answer to his objection, was not spoken to be directly com-

[1] On the other hand, Job v. 19, is to be interpreted otherwise—"*Cloud* of God," as Azarias—*Help* of God.

[2] "We may well suppose that, before he started for Damascus, Saul had informed himself of the feelings of the Jews in that city towards the Christians, and had already heard of this well-known and universally respected person." So Baumgarten; but we cannot agree with him in this; it is almost contradicted by ver. 2.

municated to Saul. What Ananias understood of his commission, and afterwards accomplished, was, as far as it was contained in the *first* communication of the Lord, simply this: "Raise him out of the deep depression of his penitence, give him gracious and new light concerning his election, take him as a believer into the fellowship of those who belong to Me." Up to this time the Lord had said nothing to Ananias about the first great event—"He beheld Me in the way to Damascus, where I appeared to him! *That* was the cause of his *blindness!*" We shall see how Ananias came to know that fact; at present we observe only this: Dazzled and blinded by the Divine glory, he must by human hands, and human words, be restored to sight, which is itself symbolical of the *order* of grace, as it proceeds in every such case, and to which everything in the history now leads.

But Ananias, with increasing confidence, the secret of which we have already pointed out, makes, in ver. 13, 14, a long objection, as if the Lord who speaks to him, and whom he once again replies to, did not know and had not heard what *he* knew concerning this evil and dangerous man! The Lord said—"Behold he prayeth!" but this appears to Ananias incredible; and, instead of himself *hearing*, he adduces what he had heard *of many* touching this man to whom he was to go. Past all invention true, to every right feeling, is this whole account, however strange it may appear; it is the genuine and sincere conversation of a disciple with his Lord. Ananias uses two peculiar designations of the Christians: not "disciples," nor "brethren," neither of which would have been in place here; but—Thy *saints* (comp. ver. 32–41); and *Who call on Thy name.* The former is derived over from *God* to the Lord Jesus: "*Thy*," as formerly in Scripture, "God's" saints (Ps. l. 5; 1 Sam. ii. 3). The latter is more strictly referred to Jesus:—"Who not merely call on the name of God, as the Jews in hypocrisy, and many pious Jews ignorantly to this day, but call with a true faith on *Thy* name;" so, since Acts i. 24, Jesus had been prayed to, and thus the common designation arose (ver. 21; 1 Cor. i. 2). "And can such an one—this man well known to me as a blasphemer of Thy name—call now himself upon Thy name? How can that be possible?" Standing before the Lord in heaven and His supreme power, he says—This man hath *authority*! In the

presence of the one true High Priest he makes mention of the high priests in Jerusalem! The attendants had hardly mentioned the letters of authority during the three days; rather, we may suppose that warning had come from distant brethren. In any case Ananias received this evil report *from many*, as generally known. But surely he was ashamed of his open and inconsiderate counter-plea, as soon as he had finished it; and said to himself, what therefore the Lord did not need to say—"But the authority of Jesus has struck down this fierce enemy, and made him blind and prayerful."

Instead of any reproof, Dost thou know better than I?—for, the sincere appeals of His people to Him, however weak, inconsiderate, or perverted they may be, the Lord never condemns; but rather takes pleasure in them, if they only come from pure hearts—instead of any rebuking word, which would have been out of harmony with the revelation of superabounding grace, the Lord said, "*Go!* let it be as I have told thee before"—in this one word expressing no more than a gentle reproving reference back to *His own* first word, which ought to have had more weight than all that Ananias might have heard from others. And then follows a second *for*, opening out *His own* secret purpose concerning this man, this Saul of Tarsus. "FOR HE IS A CHOSEN INSTRUMENT (or vessel) TO ME, TO CARRY MY NAME TO THE GENTILES, AND BEFORE KINGS, AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL." How does Ananias hearken *now* to the lofty words, which have taken so different a turn, no longer speaking of a man seeking grace who simply needed to be comforted and healed! How does he take shame to himself, and think—Thou, Lord, in very deed knowest best; and canst choose and prepare for Thyself Thine instruments? But the Lord does *not* add—Tell *him* this! The Spirit afterwards taught Ananias how much of this preparatorily to announce to the elect Apostle, and how much it was necessary as yet to conceal. The Lord Himself, in a subsequent appearance (ch. xxvi. 16–18) first declared the appointment of the Apostle of the Gentiles, and gave him the fuller words of instruction in his office; on the other hand, Ananias, ch. xxii. 5, speaks only in more indefinite expression—"a witness to all men," which might be understood as meaning, "with whom thou shall have to do, everywhere wherever thou mayest go." A chosen instrument, literally, a *vessel of election*—these

are two fundamental words, which the Apostle learned afterwards in the school of the Spirit to understand and teach for himself and others—almost as if that Spirit had literally brought to his mind this word of Jesus concerning his own vocation. We know how much he has to say concerning the free *choice* or election of God, and similarly of the *vessels* or instruments of mercy or of wrath, of honour or of dishonour. (With the same Greek expression, Rom. ix. 21–23; 2 Cor. iv. 7; 2 Tim. i. 20, 21.) Even the man most richly endowed can receive in himself the power of Divine grace only as a vessel; and only as an instrument serve Him who here says, in His royal authority over the kingdom and house of God,—a vessel *unto Me! My* name—that is the great matter; in that all is comprehended, as in ch. xxvi. 18, everything has its similar sublime close—Through the faith that is in Me! *This man* shall not merely call upon my Jesus-name, as all My saints do, and he himself also now; he shall *bear* it, that is, confess, announce and diffuse it far and wide,—whereby the expression still adheres to the figurative "vessel." Truly St Paul was full of the ointment poured forth of the most holy name (Cant. i. 3)—a good savour of Christ wherever he came. The *Gentiles* now come first—to Ananias a new and great disclosure!—the *kings* are in transition meant both of Jews and Gentiles, as St Paul testified in Jerusalem before the last Jewish king, and in Rome before the Cæsar; —finally, before the *children of Israel* is, notwithstanding the unbelief of the Jews predicted in ch. xxii. 18, the term and goal of all missions, the *end* to which the testimony of the Apostle, continued by the Spirit, will yet attain with glorious results. Compare these prophetic words of the Lord from heaven with the first rays of the prophetic light which shone around the Infant in the words of Simeon, Luke ii. 32.

But the Lord has not said all; a *third* "for" gives most conclusively the ground of the foreannounced fitness of this chosen vessel: "FOR I WILL SHOW HIM HOW MUCH HE MUST SUFFER FOR MY NAME'S SAKE." The Berlenb. Bible[1] explains this incorrectly, losing the connection of the "*for*." After the

[1] Against the *unaltered* republication of which, for our times, I thirty years ago protested—because not every man knows how to sift out the evil from the good. It is now, however, proposed to give it to the public, and I warn the laity against reading it carelessly.

correct thought that even this last clause would perfectly take away all carnal boasting, it goes on to explain: "Ask not—shall this be to him? (for this struck Ananias to the heart). God forgives the sin, but punishes it even in His elect. It shall not be forgotten that he hath injured My Church. He shall have something to endure for it. As he hath injured My saints, he shall himself be persecuted!" Truly, Ps. xcix. 8 is not thus to be interpreted. Such vindictive thoughts were certainly not in the mind of Ananias; much less did the Lord confirm them. The future Paul, when he is not ashamed of his tribulations, but glories in them (2 Cor. i. 3–6; 2 Tim. i. 11, 12; 2 Cor. xi. 23, xii. 10), never brings them into any such connection with his former guilt; he has a very different meaning in his deep word—"I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for His body's sake, which is the Church" (Col. i. 24). The prophecy which goes before from the Lord's own mouth *on him*, at his ordination, means rather the good warfare which he would thenceforth war, in faith and a good conscience (1 Tim. i. 18, 19). Thus it is not—"I will bear in mind, although he is forgiven, that he has been a persecutor!" but—"My grace will so convert and change him into an elect bearer of My name, that he shall be himself stedfastly and zealously faithful as a persecuted sufferer for My name's sake!" The apparent threatening is itself the highest promise of grace: "he shall, as an elect instrument, be counted worthy of enduring great shame for My sake" (Matt. v. 10–12, xx. 22; Acts v. 41; 1 Pet. iv. 13). And in this is included—indeed the "for" gives it prominence—the deep principle, applicable not to St Paul alone, but to all, that to every vessel of grace, and especially every witness of the Gospel, suffering is inevitable, and that the measure of affliction is in proportion to the height and dignity of the vocation. That which was said in the Old Testament, as the germ so to speak of the rule for all God's ways with the children of men, "He who will *learn*[1] much must *suffer* much" (Eccles. i. 18; comp. Prov. xv. 33),—attains, now that the great Forerunner hath entered through sufferings into His glory, its highest confirmation for all who enter into the kingdom of God, Acts xiv. 22. Thus, the great Forerunner speaks here *of this*, of the *grace* of sanctifying, confirming, and preserving

[1] Not *teach*, as we find in Luther. *lehren*.

affliction for His saints; and applies a general truth especially to this specially elect servant. "*I* will show him, that is, give him to experience"—so speaks He who has not only suffered Himself, but is ever suffering in His members. The first experience of its truth Saul had, according to ver. 23–25, in Damascus; hence in 2 Cor. xi. he mentions this *first* suffering for the sake of Christ.

But the Lord's last word had to Ananias a tone of dismissal—"Do *thou* thy part, execute thy commission; *I* will provide for all the rest of his career!" and Ananias went his way—so we read in ch. ix.; in ch. xxii. more is added which was said to him. He not only laid his hands upon "brother Saul," that he might *see* again; but, that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit, exhorted him to be baptized, and baptized him. Concerning sufferings appointed to him he says nothing; concerning his call to be a witness of the Lord he utters a very general expression; but nothing concerning his pre-eminent dignity and honour as an elect vessel. But when he goes on—Jesus, who *appeared to thee* in the way, hath sent me—and speaks of the ordained seeing of the Just One, and hearing the words of His mouth—we ask whence he came to know this. The Lord had not, according to St Luke's detailed account, declared it to him; or, did the Lord actually say more than we have in that narrative? In such matters every man is free to hold his own opinion. For our own part, we cannot consent to add anything unwritten to the measured and rounded words of our Lord from heaven, as we find them here recorded; certainly not, which would be most strange, that Jesus Himself spoke at length concerning His appearance to Saul. Thus, if St Luke records nothing of the kind, and yet relates what we further read concerning Ananias, the thoughtful reader must find another answer to the question, which is not a vain and over-curious one. Whence did Ananias know of the Lord's appearance to Saul in the way? The attendants, certainly, could only give their indefinite impression of the whole event, and Saul had not, during the three days given them any further information; moreover, Ananias, who straightway obeyed, and went to the house of Saul, previously unknown to him, had nothing to do with them. We simply explain the matter thus. After the words of the Lord, Ananias knew sufficiently well

this, that he should go to Saul, whom the Lord had in some wonderful way humbled and changed, that he should heal him and establish him. What he should *say* in connection with the imposition of hands, which could not be meant as a mere ceremonial gesture, is left to himself, that he may with wisdom gather it from what was disclosed to him—as he accordingly did. But not only so; when *the Holy Ghost* taught him to understand and to say that Saul, restored to sight, should be filled with the Holy Ghost, he himself, whose hand and word and baptism imparted that great gift, was at the same time *filled with the Holy Ghost*, as St Luke often records of the Apostles and all believers. (Acts iv. 8 31, vi. 3 5, vii. 55, xi. 24, xiii. 9, 52.) Thus, the solution of the difficulty is this, that to Ananias—possibly on the way to Saul, more probably at the moment when he begins to speak—the Spirit imparts all that he now proceeds to say. (Just as Elizabeth greeted the mother of our Lord with a sudden revelation—only that Ananias was more fully prepared.) And here we have at the same time, in the complement of the Lord's first words from heaven, the significant and instructive lesson—that it is His will to leave to the Holy Spirit in His disciples the completing of His immediate word: both go together in harmony from the very beginning.

In conclusion, it is to be observed that Ananias gave Saul no further *instruction*, or (as Olshausen expressed himself) "teaching as to the way of eternal life." Of this we read nothing in these two chapters; on the contrary, we are more than once given to understand that St Paul, as he was not called of men, so also was not instructed of men, but through the revelation of Jesus Christ, who reserved for His own teaching more than the mere *shewing* of His sufferings. Which carries us on to those further manifestations and directions which are recorded subsequently in this book.

III.

TO SAUL IN THE TEMPLE: THE MISSION TO THE GENTILES ANNOUNCED.

(Acts xxii. 17–21.)

To avoid prolixity we shall refrain from any introductory discussion of the scene and the hearers of this speech of St Paul; but we entreat our readers to strive to reproduce the whole vividly in their imagination. He stands upon the steps of the Castle Antonia, in the presence of the Jewish people, inflamed against him on account of his supposed desecration of the temple; and testifies now, for the first time, in great publicity, and at Jerusalem, concerning Christ. They were reduced to silence by a movement of his hand. From ver. 1 to 16 he has narrated the manifestation at Damascus, and Ananias' declaration at his baptism; he now goes on to give, in all simplicity, as it occurred, the narrative of a further appearance of the Lord, which belongs properly to this place.

And it came to pass, that, as I made my persecuting journey to Damascus—that was his sublime and simple word in ver. 6. With the same word he here makes a new beginning, having something most important to announce: *And it came to pass*, that, when I *came again* to Jerusalem. Consequently, this was the *first* return after his conversion, as it is recorded in ch. ix. 26–30. Further, this return took place, as we find in Gal. i. 17, 18, not till after a three years' abode in Arabia, the solitude of which, probably having for its object the calm preparation of the Apostle for his work, is concealed as a mystery.[1] Thus much is certain from Scripture; St Luke, ch. ix., passes over these three years, as he often passes over long intervals, without a word. Whether this is to be interpolated after ver. 25 in his history, or before that, between ver. 22 and 23, as *we* think,[2] is of

[1] We cannot (with Wieseler) consent to say, without qualification—"He *preached* three years in Arabia!"

[2] For this may the ἡμέραι ἱκαναί be understood: the complete time (that is, a considerable period past). The narrative is thus distributed, from ver.

comparatively little moment. Wieseler declares it to be indubitable that the "trance" mentioned by St Paul, 2 Cor. xii. 2–4, is the same which is recorded in Acts xxii. 17; but this we cannot by any means allow. The chronological reckoning is not decisive in his favour; for the vision and revelation of the Lord, 2 Cor. xii. 1, were certainly not so unfrequent as to oblige us to investigate the time of each. If the Apostle here singles out one of them only, which occurred to him fourteen years before, the reason lay in the high and heavenly matter of that revelation, as in ver. 7 he speaks of its abundance, its superabundance. The unspeakable words heard in the third heaven and paradise scarcely harmonize with the simple matter and calm procedure of the conversation with the Lord in the temple, which he relates to the Jews. We cannot understand how both could have concurred in one revelation; and should regard the trance of the Epistle to the Corinthians as rather suitable to the sojourn in Arabia (with which the chronology may be easily conformed). Nor, after all, should we assume that the manifestation recorded in Acts xxii. was actually the second communication of the Lord to the Apostle after His appearance at Damascus: the contrary is far more probable. Suffice, that to know the time and order is no more necessary here than it is in relation to the Lord's words generally, and to the appearances of the risen Lord in particular.

Trance is certainly more indirect than bodily appearance. Near Damascus Saul was not entranced; although for such seeing and hearing as that, it was necessary that a susceptibility of hearing and seeing, different from his ordinary condition, should be excited. The stages and distinctions, however real they may be, nevertheless shade off into each other. Thus, the trance may, under some circumstances, as we have just seen in the Corinthians, go far beyond other visions; while, on the other hand, it may be only the medium (as with St Peter, Acts xi. 5) for the witnessing of a vision. So was it with St Paul, who *while praying* was entranced, literally, fell into a trance; comp. Acts x. 9, the praying of St Peter. But that he was in the body, and not out of the body, he here knows full well; for

23: at the beginning the Jews would kill him in Damascus; at the end, even the Greeks (Hellenists), in Jerusalem; in the interim, ver. 26, the disciples would not acknowledge him.

he was bodily present *in the temple*:—probably at the customary hour of prayer, like Peter and John, ch. iii. 1. For, as long as the desolate temple, left over to destruction, stood yet under the patience of the Lord, so long was it honoured even by the Jewish Christians. St Paul *prays* in the temple, not indeed with the prejudiced mind of those thousands of believers spoken of in ch. xxi. 20 as so *zealous* for the law, but yet with the true love of devotion to his people and their sanctuary: he prays, who had only in Damascus learned to pray aright! He had certainly long ago come to understand St Stephen's doctrine, how much or how little the holy place was to be regarded—yet he can here, to the satisfaction of the people, relate with sincerity that he had prayed in the temple.

"That I was in a trance, *and saw Him!*" Thus, still more, the Lord Himself counts the temple worthy to be the scene of a revelation to His servant—though, indeed, only to command him, *Get thee out!* "I saw *Him*"—thus does the Apostle express himself, only in ver. 8 throughout the narrative mentioning "Jesus of Nazareth" as the name spoken by the Lord Himself: in all the rest it is the Lord, the Just One, the great He, whose unacknowledged dignity and unrendered honour are here concerned. "And saw Him *saying unto me*"—in which arrangement of the words is expressed the near and continuous seeing; not as at Damascus, where there was a sudden momentary beholding, before the hearing of the voice.

MAKE HASTE, AND GET THEE QUICKLY OUT OF JERUSALEM: FOR THEY WILL NOT RECEIVE THY TESTIMONY CONCERNING ME! This word, now reported, would vex and offend the unbelieving multitude; but scarcely less strange, though for a different reason, did it sound to the Apostle and witness himself, when he heard it first. He had returned to Jerusalem with the firm persuasion that of course the Jews in Jerusalem would be among the men to whom he should be a witness for the Lord: he burns with desire to bear his mighty *witness* in this place. The Lord takes it for granted that he felt it to be the strong impulse of his soul—provided there was no counter-command—*at once* to preach in Jerusalem, as he had done in Damascus, Jesus as the Son of God; He assumes no other remaining in Jerusalem than that which had a *testimony* concerning Himself for its object. Wherever this man may be, and

before whomsoever he may stand, there he does bear his Master's name, as Jesus had said at the first. But He now utters a counter-command! He enjoins upon him to cease, and restrain the preaching which had been already boldly commenced, Acts ix. 21, 27–29. He even commands him—and most expressly with twofold injunction—to go quickly, not only from the temple, but from the city itself! Wherefore, then, so quickly? Is there danger in delay? There was danger, and this is the unexpressed undertone of this remarkable utterance: the Lord will *save* him from the people, as it runs afterwards, ch. xxvi. 17. The foreign, Greek-speaking Jews, had already laid plots for the life of the bold preacher of the name of Jesus (ch. ix. 29)—what, then, might be expected from the rigorously orthodox, fanatical Hebrews? The open insurrection which had been excited (now as afterwards in the council, ch. xxiii. 10) had, on this his almost disobedient return, showed that. But all this the Lord does not say to St Paul; because he held not *his* life dear if he could only finish his course with joy, and testify the Gospel of the grace of God (ch. xx. 24). The reason of this interdict upon his earnest zeal, which the Lord's majesty condescends to assign, is most decidedly this only: because they would not receive the testimony, that is, would not believe it, therefore the life of His valued servant, destined to the benefit of many, should not be uselessly sacrificed. Thus the Lord speaks, who knows all things beforehand, the faith or the unbelief of all men; by this He further assures us that He reserves or takes away the testimony from no man who will yet receive it, but rather sends back *again* for their conviction, if it may be, the testimony to those who have not believed it—as now by Paul coming once more to Jerusalem. "Not receive" —spoken gently and mildly, instead of "cast it from them and blaspheme" (ch. xiii. 45, 46). For, if it may be permitted thus to speak of Him who sitteth at the right hand of God, He here utters with sorrowful tenderness, and not in threatening wrath, the sad confirmation of what He had prophesied upon earth in the anger of His love, Matt. xxiii. 32, etc., concerning the unbelief of this people and generation. He anticipates the foreseen objection in the heart of Paul: Even *thy* testimony (emphatically first in the original) will not suffice, though it be irresistible for conviction; because that testimony is *concerning*

Me—yea, concerning Me, upon whom the decree once was, Away with Him! We will not have this man to rule over us!

In spite of this plain and express word, the Apostle cannot refrain from uttering his objection—"But *my* testimony, O Lord, will not *that* be received by them?" He speaks confidently, like Ananias, with his Master; and indeed with still more confidence than Ananias, in harmony with the position which he had now by grace assumed. He has also, in a certain sense, more reason and propriety in his counter-appeal; for certainly he might think and hope that, humanly speaking, his most strong and self-evidencing testimony—less in persuasive words, than in the express fact of his so wonderfully changed personal character—must exert some influence, and win some good results. And this is reinforced by the impulse of his burning love to blinded Israel, his brethren according to the flesh who were rushing to destruction, the people of God's election:—this is most affectingly attested by the narrative throughout, which seems to avow, against all accusation—"Not through enmity against my people, or apostasy from them, have I become what I now am in opposition to my former self!" St Paul would have desired nothing better than to remain, or to become, a missionary to the Jews. He cannot altogether reconcile himself to the Lord's word—Get thee out! As many new converts who have been quickly and marvellously brought in—however otherwise not to be compared with Paul—think they will carry on a more vigorous and successful war upon the world than others, so Paul, whose soul might well be filled with the conviction—"If I go forth preaching Jesus, it will be with more demonstrative power than all the words and acts of Peter or John, and all the other Apostles! All know what I *was*, what I *did*—should they not believe when I, the same man, preach concerning Thee, and declare Thy power in my conversion?" He refers to his own approbation when the blood of Stephen was shed, and even to his actual participation in that act,[1] in order to declare that he was *ready* for the same destiny—even as in the second journey, the present one, he had remained firm, notwithstanding all prophecy of bonds and im-

[1] The keeping of the garments—not to preserve them from theft!—was something official on the part of the young man; who, however, according to ch. xxvi. 10, had given his voice against Stephen in the council.

prisonment. (Ch. xix. 21; xx. 23, 24; xxi. 4, 11–13.) *Thy witness*—as if to say, "May I not then also lay down my testimony, even though it were in death; may I not also be counted worthy of the martyr's crown?[1] Would not my blood similarly, and still more, be followed by a new blessing and increase of faith in the word of Thy testimony?"—All this was good and pleasing to the Lord, who therefore let His servant give vent to his feeling; but it showed that St Paul did not know, as his Master did, the depth of the apostasy of the world, the utter blindness of unbelieving Israel. And it is, further, proof of the lesser guilt of his own earlier unbelief, since he has no experience of the hardened perverseness of the rebellious will; but, on the other hand, as was said before, there is something of evil self which opposes the Lord in these words. For, he has in some degree departed from that first question of unconditional obedience—"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and seems to question his Lord touching his appointments; he has his own thoughts as to the special importance of his own converted *person* in the kingdom of God.

In this, again, he is right, only not as he thinks with respect to Israel,—the kingdom of God is greater, and shall extend much wider and farther. DEPART: FOR I WILL SEND THEE FAR HENCE UNTO THE GENTILES! As in the case of Ananias, the Lord refers him, too, back to His first commandment, *Depart!* and, as then, gives another FOR, with a new reason and more conclusive explanation of what He does. Not merely, The Jews will *not* believe! but, as it is hinted, Others *will* believe, and thou art reserved and appointed to testify to them. The Lord's *I* answers the (similarly prominent in the original) *I* which His servant had laid stress upon. Whither the Lord would *send* (literally more strong—would send out, send away), *thither* must His servant go, without demur; and though it be *far hence*, to those among the *Gentiles*, who with their whole heart hung upon Israel. This is probably the first plain announcement, though preliminary and pointing to the future, of his vocation as the Apostle of the Gentiles: "I will to, or will, send thee." In this calm manifestation Paul was already, before he was separated by the prophets in Antioch,

[1] Τοῦ μάρτυρός σου—the expression begins already to pass over into the later meaning of martyr, *witness unto blood*, as in Rev. ii. 13.

called to his labours among the Gentiles: hence the Holy Ghost said, ch. xiii. 2,—"To which I have already called them" (Barnabas also). Yet not before *St Peter* had preached to Cornelius (of which more afterwards)—so that the transition of the Gospel to the *Gentiles* was not here indicated to St Paul as something in itself new and strange; only *his own* specific vocation. The more full call by the appearing Lord, which is related in ch. xxvi. 16, has no special note of time connected with it; but we place it, on account of the connection, without determining the order of time, after the present announcement.

The Lord may indeed have spoken more than this; for at the word concerning the *Gentiles*, St Paul was interrupted. But it does not to us seem probable that the Lord's words communicated in ch. xxvi. followed here immediately: there are reasons against it which will be considered in the proper place. Thus we may suppose that He by degrees prepared Paul for the full announcement of his vocation. Rightly understood, we adopt v. Gerlach's note, that this was "his proper vocation as an *Apostle*" by the Lord Himself, after the preliminary declaration given by Ananias; but not yet his actual and formal institution to the apostleship of the *Gentiles*. St Paul, in that first sojourn in Jerusalem, had consorted only with the Hellenists, or foreign Jews (ch. ix. 29). When they went about to slay him, he obediently declined the death of martyrdom, and (after tarrying there fourteen days, Gal. i. 18) was brought by the brethren down to Cæsarea to Tarsus, his paternal home (as we read in ch. ix.). But, after he had accomplished much in the Gentile mission, he purposes in spirit to go once more up to Jerusalem, from which indeed the Lord had sent him away; and it pleased the Lord to accept this act of seeming disobedience (St Paul does not forget his special call; he does not purpose to remain in Jerusalem)—for He acknowledges in ch. xxiii. 11, as it were with approbation, even *this* testimony. But He orders the matter so, that he who stood as a witness before the council, and before the king, and the governor, should be carried to Rome as a prisoner—to proclaim, before the supreme power of this world, the kingdom of God which is not of this world.

IV.

FURTHER APPEARANCE TO SAUL: TO WHOM I NOW SEND THEE.

(Acts xxvi. 16–18.)

"RISE and stand upon thy feet!" Thus, in these more emphatic and literally recorded words, did the Lord speak near Damascus. But it is certain and self-evident that He *could* not have spoken then what St Paul here adds before Agrippa; for, that twice-related, definitive mandate, "It shall be told thee in the city," does not harmonise with so early an explanation and mission. Consequently, we must assume that the Apostle here sums up compendiously what was said at a later time; and connects it all very appropriately with the account of his destination—expressed in the simple *Stand upon thy feet!* —to a new service of activity in the work of Jesus. Thus it appears as if one word—"For therefore have I appeared unto thee, that thou mayest *stand* before Me, as My servant and witness, through My help and salvation" (comp. ver. 22). If, after three years, the Lord Himself in the temple at Jerusalem announced as something new—"I will send thee among the Gentiles!"—yet that which we read here in ch. xxvi. was not spoken till afterwards.

Or, was it not spoken by the Lord at all? Most expositors, even among the orthodox,[1] have come to regard it as quite probable that St Paul set down as the Lord's word what had been said to him *by Ananias*, and afterwards had been revealed to his own spirit. Against this we protested in our "Discourses of the Apostles." Alford replies that he does not *see* the necessity of regarding all these words as having been once spoken by the Lord; but to us it is not merely matter of seeing or insight, but of still more decisive feeling. It is lamentable that orthodox expositors do not more correctly *feel*, in cases where the feeling should decide. We cannot agree with Baumgarten that, "on every view, it is of no moment which way we decide;" we think that it may here be decided with confidence that, though the words "were not spoken by the

[1] Baumgarten included, whose general fidelity to the miraculous revelations scarcely prepared us to expect this from him!

Lord in immediate sequence," yet that they were *not* "communicated by Him to St Paul at a later period *through Ananias*." It is true that the weight of the matter does not rest upon the exact order of time or literality of the words; but, in the case of this narrative, and the very important words of the Lord to His servant, the difference between immediate and indirect speaking is of much moment; even as St Paul elsewhere, and on other occasions, makes this distinction prominent. Would he forget that distinction here? *Here*, when the Apostle makes the Lord speak of His having appeared, and having appeared again, has he only *placed* the words in the Lord's lips? in order afterwards, in ver. 19, to include it in the "heavenly vision!" One appearance converted the Apostle to the faith, another appointed him to be a witness, and these are embraced in one—*such* a combination alone is permissible—only one heavenly appearance of the Living One, to which he was now not disobedient. On the other hand, the Apostle would never have permitted himself to unite together in one, as spoken by the Lord at His appearance, words which were indirectly communicated to him: he could not have done this, either in the first testimony which he bore before the Jewish people, or here where he stands before the *Gentiles*, and (as Baumgarten remarks) has "the exhibition of the wide significance of the Gentile Apostolate for his object."

Let us, however, come nearer to the matter in hand. If these words were not spoken on His first appearance by the Lord, but at some later one, are they to be inserted after what is related in ch. xxii. 17–21, where the continuation was interrupted? This, for evident reasons, cannot be assumed. First, the promised sending to the Gentiles is uttered there in an entirely different, but internally necessary and significant, connection: there is no harmony between "I will send thee" first, and then immediately, "I now send thee." Then it was indeed said, ch. xxii., to the Apostle—"In Jerusalem they will *not* receive thy testimony;" but it was only hinted, not directly spoken, that that testimony would be effectual among the Gentiles. Here, on the contrary, he receives a great *promise* for the power of the word with which he is sent forth, as he in ch. xx. 32, *e. g.*, holds it fast and repeats it. Consequently, the distinction is evident between—"I will to, I will send thee!"

in the former case, and—"I send thee *now!*" in the latter.[1] As to this assertion, that ch. xxvi. records an appearance subsequent to that of ch. xxii., we said, in a former work, "Not much depends upon it, and it may be left to others to decide." But now we think differently; and to our more comprehensive view, after twenty-eight years, what we have now insisted upon places the gradual disclosure of the Apostle's great calling in its clearest and most impressive light.

The immediateness of these words—as spoken by our Lord Himself—is of the utmost importance as it respects the instruction for St Paul's office, and the plan of salvation, which are contained in ver. 18. Even if the Apostle had learned this through the Holy Spirit in the school of Christ, it would have been still truth derived from the Lord. But it would not have been lawful for him to say—Thus spake the Lord to me! No Apostle ever permitted himself to do that; least of all the Apostle who several times, with conscientious rigour, distinguishes between what he said himself (having the Spirit of God), and what the Lord had said to him:—the Apostle who, at Miletus, appends to his own long discourse, which had contained prophecy, the single saying of *the words of the Lord Jesus*, which He had spoken in His humiliation upon earth, giving it reverent distinction from his own words as their solemn close! (Ch. xx. 35.) Let it be as it may with respect to *that* appearance, which he here before Agrippa combines with the first—we have from the lips of the Lord Himself, given from heaven, one of the most fundamental, profound, and important summaries of instruction for the Apostolate and ministerial office generally.

FOR I HAVE APPEARED UNTO THEE FOR THIS PURPOSE, TO MAKE THEE A MINISTER AND A WITNESS BOTH OF THOSE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN, AND OF THOSE THINGS IN THE WHICH I WILL (YET) APPEAR UNTO THEE. Here the Lord Himself combines in one His previous and future manifestations; with reference to their sole object, the appointment and destination of St Paul to be a witness. As to this, all the various visions and revelations of the Lord, of which St Paul was counted worthy, are condensed into the one revelation of the Son, whom he should

[1] The reading νῦν thus receives a new argument in its favour: the criticism of MSS. often thus finds its support in sound exposition.

preach. (Gal. i. 12, 16.) As the Apostle writing to the Galatians thus appeals to it as one, so here he only follows the Lord Himself when he speaks, in the spirit of His words, of one heavenly appearance. "To appoint thee"—here we have, so to speak, the proper *ordination*, mission, institution, and appointment of him who was called and prepared.[1] Here it is definitely settled who was the Twelfth Apostle—as chosen by Him who alone had the right and authority—Matthias or Paul. But the *apostolical office*, as the highest rank—here exactly defined, as before by Ananias it was preparatorily prophesied of—embraces in itself all the degrees of the other offices; hence this super-episcopal ordination-formulary, with profound typical meaning, names the three essential degrees of the ruling office in the Church. *Minister* is the first and most general; the Apostles so term themselves; and yet the lowest office is a servant, a deaconship.[2] Minister and *witness*—a more definite and higher term, referring to the ministry of the word, but passing here over into the more restricted idea of eye-witness-ship.[3] Finally, the "witness of that which he had *seen*" points in this place definitely to the office of the Apostle, as such. This first *having seen* refers, in the case of St Paul, chiefly, though not exclusively, to the first great appearance; but it is then declared that he will continue to see the Lord thus appearing, and by His appearance communicating further revelations. The Lord will make *Himself* visible; for it is said, in the same word which was used before —appear to thee, be seen of thee.[4] On the other hand, an unusual construction follows: "*the things which* thou hast seen—*the things which*, or for which, in relation to which, I will appear to thee, revealing them to thee Myself."[5] Thus, there is a further advancement after the three stages already remarked upon: St Paul is appointed not only to be an Apostle, but to be an

[1] Προχειρίσασθαι, as ch. xxii. 14; on the other hand, in ch. iii. 20 (where it is the right reading), it has still its original etymological meaning.

[2] Here, however, in the original, ὑπηρέτης, not διάκονος: this latter was originally the less of the two, equivalent to a "waiter." Comp. Acts xiii. 5, but also 1 Cor. iv. 1.

[3] As in Luke i. 2 we have together αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται τοῦ λόγου.

[4] On account of this very repetition, we must reject the causative meaning of ὀφθήσομαι, which, though Winer half approves it, is strange and most questionable in itself. So Stolz translates—"make known."

[5] After the Vulgate: (de) quibus apparebo tibi (porro).

Apostle distinguished by successive continuous appearances of the Lord; while, on the other hand, the remaining Apostles testified only the things which they had seen up to the day of the Lord's ascension. (Ch. i. 22.) He is specifically the eye-witness (in which the *hearing* is included) of the *glory* of Jesus; on the other hand, St Peter, the first of the Apostles, was only a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and *partaker* of the glory which should afterwards be revealed. 1 Pet. v. 1.

If we may apply this extraordinary symbolical procedure to the ordinary ordination of every one who ministers with the testimony of what the Lord has shown him—*every* ordination not only binds a man to faithful ministry according to his present knowledge, but includes the promise of future knowledge. There is the encouraging promise of an *internal help* against dangers and darkness, of the Spirit of revelation who shall always provide a new testimony. And this leads us to the further promise of *external* help.

DELIVERING THEE FROM THE PEOPLE AND FROM THE GENTILES, UNTO WHOM I NOW SEND THEE. Instead of *delivering* (according to strict etymology, *plucking out*) some expositors would understand, "Since I have *elected*, *chosen*, *separated thee*, taken thee out;" but this has decisive reasons against it.[1] It is not that the Apostle here paraphrases and reproduces the word concerning the "chosen vessel" which Ananias had told him; but the Lord speaks in evident allusion to the *many sufferings* which awaited him. For, where saving is spoken of, there must be danger and need; which St Paul well understood, and therefore rested securely, ver. 22, on this heavenly promise of God's help, in spite of all plots against his life. Although in bonds and tribulation, he *stands* and bears witness! The Twelfth Apostle also has, in his mission into the world, the same assurance as the others—Behold I am with you!

People and *Gentiles* (as St Paul also repeats, ver. 23), is a significant phrase, derived from the Old Testament,[2] which has

[1] So Hess, Heinrichs, and Kühnöl. But the phraseology of the *Acts* is consistent throughout—ch. vii. 10, 34; xii. 11; xxiii. 27; comp. Gal. i. 4. The *choosing* could not follow upon the *appointing;* and what is the meaning of an election from among Jews and Gentiles? Is it that he was the elect of humanity? But Paul was chosen from Israel.

[2] In the Hebrew it is well known that עַם and גּוֹיִם correspond.

more in it than if the former word was merely a strange abbreviation for *God's* people. Israel was through the election of God a *people*, with the essential characteristics of a people stamped upon them in a manner which could not be predicated of any heathen race in its natural condition. Thus they were called the People simply (although the passages cited in proof by Baumgarten, Isa. xl. 7; xxvj. 11, are not strictly appropriate); the heathens, on the contrary, were called, before their vocation, not-peoples, Deut. xxxii. 21, while Israel was the ancient, or eternal, people, Isa. xliv. 7. As to the irrevocable pre-eminence and peculiar dignity of Israel, much has been said which the Scripture does not support; but the fundamental idea is strictly a Biblical element, the full establishment of which, however, does not belong to this place.

An important question now arises, whether the "*among* whom I send thee" must be referred both to the people and to the Gentiles, or only to the Gentiles. I maintained the latter with some zeal at an earlief period; but now retract. It cannot be asserted that St Paul was sent exclusively to the Gentiles, and not to the Jews as a people. The present more comprehensive mission is quite consistent with ch. xxii. 21, notwithstanding the apparent contradiction; it even brings the necessary defence against a possible misconception of that former word. St Paul does not stand before King Agrippa as exclusively an Apostle to the Gentiles; for in ver. 20 he plainly says that, being obedient, he preached repentance both to the Jews and to the Gentiles: compare ch. xx. 21. The Lord's direction in the temple did not command him no more to preach His name to any Jew (which would have contradicted ch. ix. 15), but only sent him at once away from Jerusalem, from the hardened capital, in which the election of those capable of faith was already complete. But in the dispersion among the Gentiles it had yet to be gathered in. Wherever the Apostle went to the *Gentiles*, he found the *People* among the peoples, the first-called, first-elected people; and turned, as we always read, first to the Jews. The way to the Gentiles led through the synagogue itself; and again the work of salvation among the Gentiles will find its issue in the conversion of Israel—as the order is in ch. ix. 15. It formerly appeared to me that another reason against referring this sending to the People was

to be found in the success promised in ver. 18, which might seem to contradict ch. xxii. 18, and further, ch. xxviii. 25–28. But, when closely examined, all contradiction disappears. There is no direct promise in ver. 18 of *universal* success: even of the Gentiles Rom. x. 16 holds good; while some of the Jews were saved, in contradistinction to whom the unbelievers are termed in Rom. iii. 3 only *some*. The abiding election and unrevoked destination of Israel will not allow us to admit the idea of an exclusive Apostle to the Gentiles, in the strict sense of the term; that St Paul was not intended to be such, we learn here from the lips of Jesus Himself, and it is confirmed by the whole life of the Apostle. The direct contrast which I formerly insisted upon—"The eyes of Israel were rather more fully closed, so that they turned from light to darkness, from God to the power of Satan, so that they lost the forgiveness of sins and forfeited the inheritance of the saints from whom they were cast out, and all through their *unbelief* on Jesus"—is true only of the great mass, and even of them true only in part, true of the *people* as such only for a season, as Rom. xi. testifies. The immediate and obvious mission to both Jews and Gentiles is further established by the words which precede; to wit, that the *delivering* of the Apostle was to be first from the *People*, and the Jews were, as ver. 21 and all the history shows, the most vehement persecutors of the Gospel. If St Paul had not been *sent* to the People, he would not have needed to be delivered from them.

After observing once more that, as the *now* sending shows, the present appearance cannot be placed *after* ch. xiii., and at furthest only simultaneous with it, confirming the call of the prophetic Spirit—"I Myself give thee now thy commission, with its full authority and all the instruction that it needs"—we now turn to the second and more important part of our Lord's words, which contains their full and highest significance.

For what is the Apostle sent? What is the purport, and what the commission of this *sending*,—the task, duty, and power of His office? TO OPEN THEIR EYES, THAT THEY MAY BE CONVERTED FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT, AND FROM THE POWER OF SATAN UNTO GOD; THAT THEY MAY RECEIVE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, AND THE INHERITANCE AMONG THEM THAT ARE SANCTIFIED THROUGH FAITH THAT IS IN ME. It

is remarkable, and to be lamented, that *this* verse, one of the most important and comprehensive in the Bible, is so seldom set forth in its grand importance, so seldom developed into all its fulness of meaning. We have here, from the lips of the Lord in heaven, the rule of the pastoral office, and the plan of salvation. Instruction for the office of preaching the Word generally, not merely for St Paul's: the way of salvation therein for all who are, through all ages, sanctified and saved through faith in Jesus. The prize and goal of the heavenly calling for all sinners upon earth;—the way to this end, its beginning and continuance;—the stages of the way from first to last;—the great work as the result of God's power, and yet through human faith, being carried on through the obedience and in the wills of the called;—all this is set forth as in large and most important general lines. What does God require from us in the beginning, when He sends His preached Word by His ministers and witnesses? That, when He opens our eyes, we be converted and turn! What will the grace of God then confer upon us? At the outset, and so continually, forgiveness of sins;—at the glorious consummation, the heavenly inheritance, eternal life! What is ever the certain way from beginning to end? Sanctification through the same faith in *Him*, appointed to be our Saviour, through Whom alone all is accomplished and takes effect! We cannot abstain from giving the analysis, as it is found in our "Reden der Apostel." This heavenly designation to the office of the Word may thus be resolved:

I. The simple preliminary official commission—to open their eyes.

II. The more detailed process which explains that commission.

I. The *end* or *result* which must be faithfully aimed at.

1. The condition on the side of men, placed in their own freedom, disclosing the *ground* of all, and hinting at the *end: that they be converted*, that is, may turn,

A. With reference to their *condition*—from darkness to light.

B. With reference to the *ground* of that

condition—from the power of Satan unto God.

2. Consequence and promise on the side of God, flowing from His grace: that they may *receive*—

A. *What?*

a. The first gift, ground of all that follows—forgiveness of sins.

b. Final gift, goal of all that preceded—the inheritance.

B. *How?* The way and condition of *sanctification*, carrying with it still human freedom. For

II. The *sole means* for the accomplishment of all is—*Faith in Me!*

This general arrangement will exhibit and establish the true meaning of the several clauses, which, taken singly and isolated, may easily be misunderstood. The one thing which is, properly speaking, committed to the Apostle, which he should and would accomplish, is the *opening of the eyes* by the word of testimony. It was for him certainly to labour with all diligence for all that should follow; but that conversion is far from always following to which the gift of God's grace is promised and can be given. *Who*, further, opens in reality the eyes of the blind? Assuredly, as an instrument, he who is sent for that purpose; else it would not be stated *what* that messenger should perform and accomplish. When it was first said, To this end I send thee! it means, I give thee authority and power to this end! Consequently, it is fundamentally only He, the Lord Himself, given of God to be a covenant of the *People* and a light to the *Gentiles*, who openeth the eyes of the blind, and delivereth those who are bound of Satan out of the prison-house of darkness: see Isa. xlii. 6, 7, which prophetic passage Jesus here out of heaven calls to mind, just as He did the connected passage, Isa. lxi. 1, 2, in *His own* first preaching in Nazareth, Luke iv. What a glorious concurrence and coincidence of the abiding fundamental thoughts of the exalted and the humbled Lord! He alone, the Lord Himself, makes the beginning, in the prevenient power of the Spirit of His

grace; but it is through the word of His witnesses. Humanity lies before Him, when He looks down upon it from heaven, so far revolted and fallen as to be too blinded even to see the true way of conversion. Thus has Satan smitten it with darkness, even while he promised to open its eyes. Then cometh into the world the *light* of God, in the glory of which Jesus appeared to Saul, and shineth so bright that, while the darkness where it remaineth *will* not apprehend and receive it, it at the same time *may* receive it and *ought*. The light shineth sovereignly through the veil of the eyes, enforces its first recognition—This is light! from every man—but, alas, most men even then love darkness rather than light. *Who* then are they of whom it is said, *their* eyes? Manifestly, no other than those "among *whom* I send thee;" that is, all to whom it is preached. He to whom the saving grace of God hath appeared in the Gospel, has been constrained to see the light at its first shining; the way has been shown to him, the truth has been spoken to him, the awakening word *Arise!* hath seized him in order to the opening of his eyes.

But that which now follows is left with the freedom of man. As the Lord sends the Apostle *to this end, that* he may open the eyes of men, so their eyes are opened *to this end, that* they may be converted and turn. But they are not all obedient to the Gospel. Many, yea, the greater part, wilfully shut their eyes all the more closely, unto the worse blindness and hardening of unbelief. The latter part of the clause has been made parallel with the former, and thus construed, "To open their eyes *and to convert them;*" but this arrangement cannot in any way be justified.[1] The turning, as the *receiving*, lies with man; the former being the condition of the latter. Where otherwise would be the first expression of that *faith*, which is at the last laid down as the great condition remaining with the freedom of man? The first thing which any man does, or can, or should do, whose eyes have been opened to see his error and wretchedness, is obviously to *turn himself* from his misery for

[1] It is true that ἐπιστρέψαι occurs thus transitively Luke i. 16, 17, Jas. v. 19, 20; and in Acts xiv. 15, and iii. 26, according to the right exposition. On the other hand, it is more usually said, and especially of the heathen, that men convert themselves: 1 Thess. i. 9, Acts xv. 3, 19; and in ver. 20 of our chapter, *this* interpretation of what went before is given.

help: compare the same connection in Luke i. 79. The Apostle, indeed, whose own eyes had been opened by the light of the Lord, should and could open their eyes; he was to carry to them the same message which Ananias brought to himself —"Brethren, the Lord Jesus hath sent me that ye may receive your sight." But more than that he cannot effect, in opposition to the will of those who hear him. *They* may and should turn themselves from darkness to light, because their eyes have been opened; *if* they do so, they can *receive* the gift of grace, and can become sanctified, because they have received in the forgiveness of sins the ground of that holiness, and, in the hope of the promised inheritance, invigoration for the faithful maintenance of faith unto the end. This, and no other, is the true order of salvation. This is what St Paul exhibits to Agrippa and the whole assembly; for he preaches also to them that they should be converted and become such as he was (ver. 29).

Hence it appears that this first opening of the eyes is something altogether different from the later following, rather already presupposed, *enlightenment*. Christ can give light only to him who has not only been awakened, but has arisen up (in conversion, Eph. v. 14). That produces then the enlightened eyes of *the heart* (Eph. i. 18, in the right reading) in those who have already tasted the heavenly gift (Heb. vi. 14). On the other hand, the first opening does not give a man clearly to *know* the hope of the calling, the riches of the glorious inheritance, the exceeding greatness of the power of God in those who believe: he only distinguishes, at first, like children learning to see, the darkness from the light; he can only say this one thing—I was in darkness and blindness, but now I see the light! (John ix. 25.)

The old *state* from which, and the new state to which, we turn, are described simply as states, as *darkness* and *light*, according to the general language of Scripture, and 1 Pet. ii. 9, 10 particularly, where the call is similarly defined. They who receive the call in faith, *convert* or *turn themselves* (round, back) from their darkness to the light which has appeared; not that they perfectly come out of the darkness, and enter the perfect condition of light—which would be regeneration itself, or, indeed, the finished goal of sanctification—but that they *penitently*

turn themselves from their old character *with desire towards* the light of God, towards the right way of a better life as exhibited by the light of truth. This turning from and turning towards are called elsewhere *repentance* and *conversion* (ver. 20, ch. iii. 19); but because both are inseparable in their union, each expression may stand alone, inclusive of the other, for the whole. (So here conversion, as in ch. xx. 21 repentance.)

As soon, then, as this conversion becomes real and effectual, there follows as its necessary consequence, not indeed that full and complete insight into Satan's kingdom and power, and the light and nature of God, which is reserved for our perfection, but at least a commencing insight into the deeper *ground* of that twofold *condition;* as the preaching word exhibits it, in order to excite the profound attention of the soul. It is *Satan*, in whose power are not merely the heathens (as the Jewish maxim was), but all blind sinners in common; for the darkness is from Satan, and he is the prince of the power of darkness upon earth (Col. i. 13). It is Satan who keeps closed the eyes which would otherwise open themselves even to the natural light which visits all. It is *God*, the fountain of light, to lead back sinners to whom, from their deep apostasy, is the great aim of the whole work of grace. He who is exalted in heaven still speaks with all plainness— as He formerly did according to the orthodox faith of the Jews—of *Satan* (comp. five times in the Epistles from heaven, Rev. ii. and iii.); this doctrine must be preached to the Gentiles also, and must by them also be acknowledged as a fundamental truth. It may be said that "from darkness to light" refers *rather* to the blinded Jews, and "from Satan's power to God" *rather* to the Gentiles, altogether sundered from God and in the power of evil.[1] But this has only a relative truth; for both in their deepest principle refer to all sinners who are to be converted (sinners of the Jews, sinners of the Gentiles, Gal. ii. 15).

All darkness is a prison (Isa. xlii. 7), and its bonds and chains are the bondage of hell (2 Pet. ii. 4; Jude 6). There is a *power* of darkness which holds and enslaves men. However easy and sudden might seem the first conversion at the beginning, as the mere turning from darkness towards light, the

[1] As similarly in ver. 20: the Jews must repent, and the Gentiles be converted to God.

process reveals an enchaining power which will not let man go. And in this *God* alone can help; to Him therefore alone man must more fully turn. It is not said "to the power of God;" the name of *God* is enough, and its might is placed alone in opposition to all other power. Nor is the light, again, an imprisonment; we do not become servants of God, as we had been servants of Satan and of sin. The kingdom of the Son of His love is opened, in blessed freeness and liberty (Col. i. 13)—the open access even to the heart of God, properly *to God!*

But with the first step of conversion to God begins the *receiving;* for he that draws nigh to God receives from Him. The first full gift for the rebellious, which itself was secretly included when He *gave* repentance and awakened to life and conversion, and which must then be consciously received with joy, is—*forgiveness of sins.* "The recollection of one's own sins is the real centre of all self-consciousness" (Baumgarten);—by this consciousness, fully awakened in conversion, the merciful Lord now seizes the sinner, who in his first penitent coming to the rebuking light of grace has already performed a work in God; and thus, in the consciousness of received forgiveness, the new man is fully born. *This* is now light instead of darkness, fellowship with God instead of servitude to Satan, the deceiver and accuser. *This* is ever the first pure grace; received out of the fulness of God the Saviour, not yet as grace for grace, but as grace solely for our sin. Observe, that we were under the power of Satan, not without our own will and our own guilt; notwithstanding there is full forgiveness for that and for all our sins.

That in the economy of salvation the same forgiveness of sins, the great grace of the New Testament, must ever be laid throughout the whole process of sanctification as the foundation of a continual new beginning, even as thence alone power cometh to the faint (Isa. xxxiii. 24)—that access into the strengthening fellowship of the Lord, whose flesh and blood we eat and drink that He may live in us, is opened to us only through the continual new appropriation of forgiveness—of all this we speak not now more at large; since the exposition of the individual sayings would thus lead us into the whole doctrinal system, and ethical relations, of the plan of salvation. We go on to observe with what wonderful suddenness the *and* connects *the inheritance*

with the forgiveness, the end with the beginning.[1] For God, who begins, finishes also His work in all those who cease not to receive from Him. It might be said here also that the forgiveness of sins is referred *rather* to Israel, and the portion in God's inheritance *rather* to the Gentiles; comp. Eph. i. and Col. i. But, in the Apostle's doctrine in these chapters, and still more fully here, both are connected together in one. The peculiar expression used[2] might also be translated—*a lot*, a portion of the inheritance—and that would be perfectly true as it respects the individual appropriation; but the comprehensive saying here pre-eminently refers to the Lord's new people as such, gathered from the People and the Gentiles alike. It is "the inheritance of the saints in light"—first as reserved for us in heaven (1 Pet. i. 4); and then, if we attain unto the end of faith, received as the *salvation* of the soul; but finally as consummate *glory* on the new and heavenly earth, of which Canaan was the type.

But what is, finally, the *condition*—which again assumes our freedom, our receiving, retaining, and using the gift of God—the only way from the forgiveness of sins to the inheritance? The inheritance of the *saints* in light is only for them that are *sanctified*. This sanctification is possible only on the ground of grace received, and in the knowledge of the goal set before us; but we reach that goal only as *perfect*, when sanctification is fully accomplished—and this is plainly spoken in the carefully chosen word "sanctified."[3] The entering among the sanctified is reckoned with *that which is received*, as the last, highest, and perfect gift of God's grace (Rom. vi. 23); but it is also, on the other hand, regarded as the condition and limitation of the receiving—Only among *those that are* sanctified! Such

[1] So Col. i. 12–14, and the third section of the Apostles' Creed.

[2] Κλῆρος, derived from the Old Testament, and glorified in the New—on which a whole treatise might be written.

[3] "For, whereas the deficiency of Israel's sanctification was proved by the fact, that in the possession of their inheritance they became proud, and in the gifts of the earth forgot their Maker and Redeemer (Deut. xxxii. 15), the New Testament saints are not introduced into the possession of their inheritance until they have proved by deeds that they prefer the pure and holy communion of the soul with God, without any external corporeal addition, to all and every possession upon earth, and thereby accomplish the total deliverance of their souls from the entire kingdom of darkness and of Satan." —(Baumgarten, Acts of the Apostles, vol. iii., p. 167, Clark's edition.)

will there be at the last, and they shall receive the inheritance. Yet not with all that were called;—for many of them, alas, will forget to make their calling and election sure! (2 Pet. i. 9–11)—with all that are sanctified we shall enter the everlasting kingdom. But this fellowship with *all* saints (ch. xx. 32) is an essential elevation of final blessedness, although God Himself will for ever be the ground and spring of that blessedness.

There only remains the inexpressibly important and sublime conclusion—*through faith which is in Me;* in which the Son of God, the only Saviour of all the world, unites poor believing sinners upon earth with His own glory in heaven, and with His own exalted person. It has been needlessly disputed whether this "by faith" refers more narrowly to the "sanctified by faith," or points further back to the *receiving*.[1] We have already given our decision that faith here comes last as the only means *of the whole;* it is not merely receiving, but also persevering faith, faith which is approved and confirmed through obedient fidelity even to the end. We are indeed finally sanctified only through faith; but only through faith were we converted, and received the forgiveness of sins. And this faith which we hold fast from stage to stage through obedience and fidelity, in the warring of the good warfare for the fulfilment of our course (2 Tim. iv. 7), is not only a faith in *God*, but in Him also through whom alone we can have faith and hope towards God (1 Pet. i. 21)—in the Lord Jesus, who here saith out of heaven, Through faith that is in *Me!* Faith in His name, His word generally, draws and turns us round from Satan to God; faith in Him who was dead gives us the forgiveness of sins; faith in the risen Lord gives us power unto renewal in holiness; faith in the glorified Lord strengthens in us the hope of the inheritance; through faith in the whole Christ we attain to our whole salvation. Thus majestically does this Saviour in heaven, without whom there is no salvation for all men under heaven (Acts iv. 12), place Himself in the stead of God, on whose throne He sitteth *for us*.

Faith, Faith, nothing but Faith—this is and must ever be the simple, and nevertheless not easy, way to the end of

[1] For certainly, as Baumgarten beautifully though rather scholastically says, "Faith is the ethical consummation of the *receptive* capacity, over which Satan has obtained no power."

glory. It is the vocation of all the Lord's ambassadors to proclaim the obedience of faith in His name. Here before Agrippa St Paul answers for himself—"Thus did He speak to me, and how should I not believe in Him? Thus did He command me—Preach the faith that is in Me! How should I not testify of Him?" St Paul had *seen* Him; but only to the end that he might preach faith and the not-seeing. St Paul is in a certain sense pre-eminently the Apostle of *faith*, yet only as it regards his doctrinal system—for what Apostle either preaches or teaches anything but faith? Here we must resist the strange theory of Baumgarten, and not allow that "He lays on the shoulders of St Paul alone, after St Peter and the rest of the original Apostles had accomplished their work, by which the first foundation of the Church was laid, the work of His salvation for the nations of the earth—and that, for the immediately subsequent period, St Paul is introduced as being exclusively entrusted with the guidance and extension of the Church!!" Where in all the Scripture is this written? Where in this mission and instruction is there any token of this exclusiveness? *With* all the others (1 Cor. ix. 5, xv. 9), he executed his office—as the least of them, who in His work became the greatest; but it is the same office which, as having authority to call sinners through faith in Jesus to salvation, is continued even in *every* vocation to preach and bear witness. That which we have expounded upon ver. 18 in particular, holds good of every preacher, and of all hearers, without any deduction for the specific authority or power conferred on St Paul.

V.

TO ST PETER IN THE TRANCE UPON THE HOUSETOP.

(Acts x. 13–16; xi. 7–10.)

It is not consistent with the opinion which elevates St Paul high above the first Apostolate of the Twelve, that the first transition of the Gospel to the Gentiles, properly so called, was not reserved for the Apostle of the Gentiles, but that *St Peter*

was in this respect also chosen to be *first* (ch. xv. 7). Thus, as St Paul was not exclusively an Apostle to the heathen world, so those who were Apostles before him did not, as their very vocation for all the nations intimates, confine themselves to Israel. After Saul had preached to the Jews in the synagogues of Damascus—probably during his protracted sojourn in Arabia, and still more probably *before* the Lord had announced to him his mission to the Gentiles[1]—*St Peter* receives the revelation which constrained him to preach to Cornelius. We have not arranged these expositions strictly in chronological order (there might have been some difficulty in determining it, if we had so purposed); for it was our object to give the stages of St Paul's calling in their connection.

But we shall at the same time observe that, although St Peter was acknowledged as the first in preaching to the Gentiles (which, however, did not involve any other pre-eminence, and make him a "prince of the Apostles"), he *comes behind* St Paul in his own personal endowments, and in his capacity for special revelations and gifts of the Lord. On this subject —how this is to be understood, and how not; how St Paul, dignified by higher revelations, was not therefore before the Lord of higher account—we cannot now more particularly dwell: it may be enough for our purpose to establish the fact that St Peter did not see the Lord of glory, and receive immediate revelations from Him, in the same manner as St Paul did.[2] An *angel* had led him, with all the Apostles, out of the prison some time before, and afterwards we find *the Spirit* speaking to him (ch. x. 19; just as to Philip, ch. viii. 29). It is remarkable that the Holy Ghost, who in the Acts of the Apostles specially guides the Missionary Church, here personally says—I have sent the men (comp. ch. xiii. 2)—yet this is not the I of the Lord Jesus Himself, which had spoken to St Paul. *The voice*, again, which St Peter receives in the vision

[1] For St Peter was then again in Jerusalem; having returned from the itinerary which St Luke supplementarily records. The particulars of all this are not easily arranged.

[2] Had it been so, we should have found some record of it in Scripture, as of a matter highly momentous. On the other hand, St Peter in his (genuine!) Second Epistle appeals only to this, that he had been an "eye-witness of the Lord's glory" upon the mount; and in ch. iii. 16 he with beautiful humility admits the superior wisdom given to his brother Paul.

of a trance, could be no other than that of the Lord—this seems due at once to him and the object concerned. *Angels* speak in the New Testament (not now to speak particularly of the Old Testament), even when they do not become visible, as in the case of Cornelius, in dreams and visions; but we never read of *trance* in connection with them. Nor can we conceive that it was merely an indefinite *voice*, merely an appendage of the vision which admitted no question as to *who* it was that spoke; for St Peter addresses the speaker immediately as *Lord*. But, finally, the voice "of God" speaks in the New Testament most expressly (as in the Old Testament latently) through the Son alone, and now through the exalted Jesus Christ. Although St Peter afterwards, ver. 28, says that *God* had showed him the truth, he speaks thus at the first in the hearing of Cornelius, only in order that he might not inappropriately anticipate his preaching concerning Jesus Christ, the Lord of all (ver. 36).

Three times in the Acts of the Apostles the great manifestation to Saul is described; and at least twice the manifestation to Peter, which of itself was of great importance in relation to this great crisis and turning-point in the course of the kingdom of God. By the repeated narrative it is made abundantly plain that the Apostle did not see and hear what He saw and heard, for himself alone; but for all to whom, through him, it was spoken and delivered.

While St Peter was engaged in a successful mission at Joppa among the Jews (ch. ix. 42, 43), and on the same day that the messengers from Cornelius were on their way to him, he went up at noontide to the housetop to pray. For, his practised piety had added to the two customary hours of prayer (at the morning and evening sacrifice) the third at mid-day, which had also become a custom (Ps. lv. 18; Dan. vi. 10). The flat roofs of the houses had ordinarily an upper chamber,[1] whither men were accustomed to retreat for thought or devotion; but the tanner's house may be supposed to have had an open roof, since the vision supposes the unobstructed heavens to be before him. It is *in prayer* that the revelation comes to St Peter, as also to Cornelius. But he, who had a work to do in Joppa and no special occasion then to fast, is not, like Cornelius, adding

[1] In St Luke ὑπερῷον, called in the Old Testament עֲלִיָּה; see especially 2 Kings iv. 10.

fasting to prayer. As was quite possible to the bodily infirmity even of an Apostle, he became hungry in his prayer, even *very* hungry:—this probably was the result of an extraordinary influence preparing him for the *vision*, the symbolical language of which connected itself with his hunger, according to the analogy of such revelations generally. St Peter would not be altogether interrupted in his intenser and deepening devotion by taking the mid-day meal,—he desired only a slight repast.[1] While this was being prepared for him he fell into a trance; literally, a trance fell upon him, so that he beheld a vision and heard a voice. After a full meal this would not have taken place.

From the heaven, which shines upon him as if opened, there descends to him a table wondrously spread for his hunger: a structure or vessel of a peculiar kind and amazing greatness; as it were a great sheet bound by cords at the four corners, and so let down to the earth, that is, above the roof, and immediately before him. In it he beheld not merely "all kinds of," but *all* beasts,[2] that is, one of every species, clean and unclean united. The entire animal world, not excluding the birds of heaven, great and small; even creeping things—the smaller animals, and not "edible insects!"[3] The names of the three main genera, besides the birds, correspond (though not literally) to the account in the creation, Gen. i. 24, where, if we rightly understand it, there can nothing be as yet said about insects or reptiles. Well may St Peter have contemplated all this with profound astonishment![4] But scarcely has the question arisen —What is this? what does it mean to me? when a *voice* (*from heaven*, as ch. xii. 9 adds, after ch. x. had made it obvious) gives him an answer yet more strange: RISE, PETER, SLAY AND EAT! After the manner of a dream, the killing and eating are combined in one; and there is no distinction expressed as to what was upon the immense livingly-spread table, on the border of which, as we may suppose from the Apostle's words, only unclean animals were to be seen.

[1] This is a more befitting expression than Luther's *anbeissen*, for γεύσασθαι, comp. ch. xx. 11.

[2] As the Article, standing alone in ch. xi., still more expressly shows.

[3] As Neander expresses himself, according to the too prevalent misunderstanding, for ἑρπετά, Heb. שֶׁרֶץ —which signifies only the smaller animals in contradistinction from בְּהֵמָה and חַיָּה.

[4] Ch. xi. 6, ἀτενίσας κατενόουν.

We pause here in our contemplation, and ask, as St Peter when come to himself asked in doubt, ver. 17, with hope of a certain answer, what the meaning of the vision was. Indeed, we cannot miss its meaning if we thoughtfully consider it. We have the actual solution of it in the history which follows, as well as in the decisive word of St Peter—God hath showed me that no *man* is to be counted common or unclean. But through what process do we reach that conclusion, since we cannot at once say that *animals* signify men? First of all, we must do justice to the obvious reference to the Mosaic laws of distinction in food. The connection is plain; since it was the prohibition to eat unclean animals which practically constituted the most rigorous wall of partition between the Israelites and the Gentiles—especially at this time, when human ordinances had rendered those laws still more stringent. Because the ceremonially strict Jew might not eat with the Gentile, all confidential intercourse and all perfect communion generally was cut off by this prohibition of table-fellowship; as in ch. xi. we read that in Jerusalem the whole Jewish-Christian community made it an objection to the first Apostle "that he had *eaten* with them"—in comparison of which the preaching and baptizing comes not into further consideration! St Peter could not have paused in doubt as to whether the Divine declaration expressed the abolition of this Levitical distinction between clean and unclean animals as to killing and eating; this was directly declared, and he would immediately think of the words of Jesus in Mark vii. 15–23. But that from this very much would follow, and that the vision would *signify* much more than this, is a matter which he thoughtfully ponders. We hold to his own expression when all was made plain to him—No *man* is any longer unclean. As in visions, and the symbolical language of prophecy generally, more than one interpretation is commonly involved, the animals are here at the same time used figuratively for men, and the unclean are the Gentiles, whom the Jews had hitherto so regarded. We know that the Jewish phraseology already applied the names of unclean beasts to those who ate them (Matt. xv. 26; vii. 6). Thus the entire animal world, which was here shown to the Apostle in its *manifold variety* according to the original creation, and in which there was to be no longer a distinction of clean and unclean, is the race of mankind upon

earth in all its peoples and kinds. The sheet descends from heaven to earth; and this means, according to the place and occasion of the vision, in general—Here heaven and earth are concerned in common; it is a matter upon earth, which has been decided in heaven. But this is scarcely the whole meaning, for it is not merely the voice which comes from heaven. Are not all men to be regarded as originally coming from heaven and having sprung from God, according to their first creation?[1] Thus, this comes first—All men upon earth (the four corners are the four quarters of heaven) are still of Divine origin (ch. xvii. 28). But this of itself must not be pressed further, since they have become universally unclean through their sin. Consequently, we must advance to the full and perfect interpretation:—The vessel or sheet is the *Church* of the Lord, into which, through the decree and grace of Heaven, are to be received for heaven men of all nations; because grace renews and re-establishes the original creation. Both the heavenly origin and the heavenly renewal of mankind are embraced in one.

And now for the *killing* and *eating* which is required of the Apostle. It is scarcely the mere *intercourse* with Gentiles (eating with them, the unclean) that is meant; for that the symbolic figure would have been too strangely emphatic, apart from the consideration that an *Apostle* would not have to do with people hitherto avoided, except for the accomplishment of his vocation in the preaching of the Gospel. Rieger says, more correctly: "In this figure the future success of his mission was set before St Peter; it presented to his hopes the wished-for satisfaction of all his spiritual longings, but on the condition of his resignation and denial of what had been customary and pleasing to his own nature. He must submit to God's judgment and the election of grace; for He declares what is acceptable and pure in His sight, and to His judgment all the repulsions of our own nature and fleshly mind must bow down." This sets us at least upon the right track. We need not think here of any sacrificial slaying and priestly service (as Rom. xv. 16);[2] for it is very obvious that St Peter feels, besides his bodily hunger, another hunger of the spirit, to which the symbolical vision responds. What can we suppose him to have so earnestly *prayed for* but

[1] Are *acceptable*, as δεκτός, ver. 35, means.

[2] The θῦσον with φάγε stands simply for slaying.

the success of his office, and his soul's satisfaction in its success —the spread of the Gospel of grace? The many who had believed in Joppa had not satisfied that desire; while he tarries with them, his thoughts are away in his missionary journeyings, and probably far beyond the Jewish land. But because he supposes that the Gentiles could be accepted only on the hard and seldom-accepted condition of circumcision and subjection to the whole law, he is oppressed and disquieted. Thus his secret conflict in prayer had prepared him, more than he knew, for the heavenly revelation which now grants his desires:—Rise, Peter, and satisfy thine hunger for the salvation of *all men* under heaven! (Ch. iv. 12.)

But he does not on the instant know and understand this. Conscientious even in the trance, in the waking dream, he draws back with distaste and dread from the unclean food, even as Saul would earlier have done. *No* (literally, *by no means, assuredly not*), *O Lord!* This is his first word to the unknown Speaker—the "Lord" Himself it may be, tempting him. The intenser assurance, I have never eaten anything either common or unclean! he quotes probably by memory from the words of Ezekiel the prophet; see ch. iv. 14. But hereupon the voice grows more strong in its rebuke of that which was not right in his supposed vindication of perfect right. It proceeds to utter words which already pass over into the interpretation of the mystery—WHAT GOD HATH CLEANSED, THAT MAKE (call, esteem) THOU NOT COMMON! It is not now slaying and eating that is spoken of; for that only had an ulterior meaning. *What* God hath cleansed—and it was this "what" that St Peter afterwards so deeply pondered. First, as still keeping to the symbol: "That which God, by sending down for thee from heaven and commanding thee to eat, has declared clean, that shouldst *thou* not (contradictory child of man) any longer term unclean, and desecrate again by treating it as such!" But this has literally another meaning, at the same time, for the interpretation. *All* is unclean until *God cleanses* it; this is indeed true, but God can still maintain His right. The natural, animal men are not only likened to brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed (2 Pet. ii. 12), but they are originally unclean, like all animal food before the Flood. In His permission to Noah, God cleansed *all* animals

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for the *food* of man (by the side of the abiding distinction for the sacrifice to God, Gen. vii. 2)—in the prohibition by Moses certain animals were again made common by God—but now in the commandment to St Peter all is again called clean. In the covenant of Noah the whole human race was accepted, before the Gentiles were by the Jewish law (transitorily) cast out; and now in baptism the covenant of grace is established again with all flesh (1 Pet. iii. 21). Through Christ, through its union with His heaven descending in Christ, God *has* actually cleansed entire humanity: here there is not merely a return to a former covenant of grace; but, going still further back, there is the restoration of all creatures to their first and pure creation. Thus, "whom God hath accepted, and will go on to accept in grace, let no man despise, and cast him out as nevertheless unclean!" This most emphatic *warning* is here uttered for the whole Church of the Jews believing in Christ, to whom St Peter must deliver it; just as St Paul received the word for the Jews who persecuted Christ—Why persecutest thou Me? In the most immediate application, Cornelius himself is seen to be cleansed by preparatory grace unto the fear of God and the working of righteousness; and to this *first* application St Peter afterwards refers in ver. 35, though he had already, ver. 28, uttered its most full interpretation—No man is henceforth unclean either to God or to us, not even the most outcast heathen. He subsequently entered more deeply into the profoundest meaning of the fulfilment of the word, in ch. xv. 9—God hath put no difference between us and them, *purifying* their hearts by *faith*.

While Peter at first keeps silence, in astonishment and thought, he hears once more, RISE, PETER, SLAY AND EAT! Whether he actually renews his objection, and thus the whole happened *thrice;* or, whether only the repeated command to eat is to be reckoned as the *third* voice—is open to discussion. According to the simple letter, we should suppose that, after the fashion of a dream, the *whole* three times occurred, in order that it might be confirmed and rendered decisive to him: comp. Gen. xli. 32. Whether the triple number is to be referred to the three men, ver. 19 (as to many the connection, ch. xi. 10, 11, *seems* to intimate), we doubt; nothing would be gained by it, for there was no particular message to be given to each of the three. That, finally, the vessel is received up again into heaven,

does not (as has been supposed) introduce the other side of the interpretation—"That which came from heaven is taken up and acknowledged by heaven" (this acknowledgment was contained in the vision itself); but it is only the appropriate end by which the whole is stamped as a teaching and revealing vision—"Now return to thyself, and *ponder* what this may mean!" God's further guidance in facts, and our own subsequent reflection in consequence, opens up to us afterwards the meaning of His revelations. St Peter, who was too deeply entangled with the Jewish law, required the new and direct teaching of the Holy Ghost to deliver him; but we see that the method taken with him was to make him first *ponder* and *doubt* about his former prejudices, before the perfect will of God was disclosed to him. And thus, notwithstanding the striking difference in the Lord's dealings with St Paul and St Peter, we see the same fundamental law in operation: the miracle leaves something still in the revelation for man's own appropriation in the natural way; be it more or less, there is ever the personal and voluntary appropriation.

VI.

TO ST PAUL IN CORINTH.

(Acts xviii. 9, 10.)

If we would not, with alas! most expositors, hurry over these simple and yet sublime words to St Paul, so specially significant as they are, we must assist our living apprehension of the whole by observing the entire position and state of mind in which these words of the Lord found him. He had been summoned, by the visit of the man from Macedonia, ch. xvi. 9, to *Europe*. He had baptized the first-fruits of European Christendom, and laid the foundation of what we must regard as the most flourishing and interesting of the apostolical churches. Driven from Thessalonica and Berœa, after brief labours, through the fury of the Jews, He uttered a mighty and most public testimony in *Athens*—being for a considerable space without his companions—but with little success among its proud disputants and babblers. From Athens he proceeded to *Corinth*. Athens aimed rather to represent the past of

Greece, now degraded from its glory, and prostrate under the Roman power; but Corinth was content to be the capital of Roman Greece, the residence of the ruling Proconsul of Achaia. While in Athens what was left of Greek science and wisdom still sought to maintain its pre-eminence, Corinth had abandoned itself to all the vanity and debauchery of sensual life. After its sack by Mummius, it had been re-established in all its former glory, as the so-called "ornament of Greece." Nor was she wanting in art and science, especially in that of rhetoric, as referred to in the Epistles to the church which afterwards arose in her; but the predominant characteristics of the city, as she was situated on the isthmus with two harbours, were commerce, riches, magnificence, wantonness, debauchery. Not the goddess of Wisdom, as in Athens, but Aprodite, the goddess of carnal lust (at least, as she had now become), had the most celebrated temple; statues were erected to eminent prostitutes, as to Lais; and the Greek phrase, "*to live in Corinthian fashion*," was expressive of all extravagance of debauchery and riot.

This was the place to which St Paul came from Athens, and where at first he consorted, as a tentmaker, with a Christian Jew. He did not delay, indeed, to open his mouth on the Sabbaths to the Jews in the Jewish synagogues; but this seems, as in the case of the discourse adapted to the Greeks in Athens, to have borne the character rather of a preparatory, calm exposition of Scripture, which might lead the way to the true Messiah. It was not until his companions, Silas and Timothy, who had been left behind, had returned to him by his own desire (ch. xvii. 14, 15) from Macedonia, that he was pressed in spirit—urged *by the word*, as the right reading has it—to testify to the Jews concerning the person of *Jesus*, that He was the promised Christ. It is obvious, according to the account of St Luke, that this return of his companions, and the intelligence which they brought of the progress of the Gospel, stood in the connection of a cause with the stronger zeal of St Paul; and this is directly stated also in the Epistle which was written from here (1 Thess. iii. 6–8).[1] But we are not on

[1] Thus the exposition is incorrect, which is accepted by Alford: When these came, *they found him* (more than before) earnest and vehement in preaching.

that account to understand the "word," as many do, of the *narrative* of these friends; for such a meaning the expression "*the* word" would be quite unusual: it would have required, at least, "by *their* word."[1] But we must understand the *pressing*, just as in 2 Cor. v. 14; the living, indwelling word of God inwardly urges the Apostle to utter all its fulness of exhortation and promise. It is a very pregnant form of speech, which may be interpreted by Jer. xx. 8, 9.

This pressure and urgency of zeal is quite consistent (as in the Prophets, it is the overcome opposite) with a certain weakness, with a degree of fearfulness and anxiety, such as the Apostle, dispirited by want of success in Athens, had brought to Corinth, 1 Cor. ii. 3. After he had in Athens, and at first also in Corinth, adopted a style of discourse which simply paved the way for conviction, by entering into the thoughts and subjects which he found around him, he now begins, simply and emphatically, to know and to preach only Jesus Christ the Crucified, with no other demonstration than that of the Spirit, and of the power which was in his own weakness. This soon brings men to decision. The Jews contradict and blaspheme; so that he shakes the dust from his feet and his garments, and turns, pure from the guilt of their blood, to the *Gentiles*. Hard by the synagogue, for a strong standing testimony, and, as it were, still to attract the Jews,[2] he set up his school of instruction; the chief ruler of the synagogue (whom, as an exception, the Apostle himself baptized, 1 Cor. i. 14), with *many* other Corinthians, believed and were baptized.

This is the Apostle's position and tone of mind, when another direct word of his Lord comes to him. It is indeed through a vision of the night (as in ch. xvi. 9), yet immediately in His own person, that Jesus addresses the man who was elected to this pre-eminent distinction of nearer intercourse. Afterwards in Jerusalem, ch. xxiii. 11, it was once more so; and, finally, an angel was sent to Paul, as to others. That which in the beginning, when the Apostles were in prison, was the office of an angel—the comforting encouragement to speak boldly the words of life (ch. v. 20)—the Lord here

[1] Even Menken: "How invigorating was the influence of his friends' words!"

[2] Not so entirely separated as afterwards in Ephesus, ch. xix. 9.

assumes for Himself: FEAR NOT, BUT SPEAK AND KEEP NOT SILENCE! Still coming first the same word of encouraging grace—so needful to us poor children of men—which runs through the whole of Scripture from beginning to end, *Fear not!* Simon Peter heard it from the lips of the Lord Jesus when his call to be a fisher of men was repeated, Luke v. 10. Abraham received it first in the Old Testament, Gen. xv. 1—after a victory, too, like St Paul here; for father Adam first of all confessed in behalf of us all—I was afraid! The Lord and His angels often say it in the Old Testament; the New begins with it to Zacharias, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds. The Lord often utters it during His earthly life, down to John xiv. 1: the angels at the sepulchre of the risen Jesus give it new strength. The ascended and glorified Redeemer inspires vigour into the soul of St John at Patmos by the same word, FEAR NOT! Rev. i. 17. How needful is this word to His disciples everywhere and in all ages; and how ready He ever is to utter it to them! It is the abiding word of the Divine majesty and mercy for human poverty, weakness, and guilt. St Paul in Corinth needed it pre-eminently, as the Lord well knew. Without were fightings, within were fears—this was the ordinary condition of the Lord's ambassadors in the world: 2 Cor. vii. 5; John xvi. 33. But they must continually take fresh courage for their duty, that they may *speak* the word without fear (2 Tim. iv. 2). "But *speak*, teach and preach, testify and exhort with confidence, with more and more confidence, and *keep not silence!*" is the Lord's word to St Paul. This latter is not added merely as the emphatic close of the solemn saying, or as an expressive repetition; but it has the meaning of the Old Testament phrase, as in Isa. lviii. 1; lxii. 1, 6. And it is to be observed, further, that the Lord here (as in ch. xxiii. 11) graciously acknowledges and confirms St Paul's former witness in Corinth; it is as if He said with commendation—"What thou hast already spoken has been well spoken; go on confidently, and change not!"

What, then, could cause the Apostle to err, and make him fear? The glance at opposition and the host of persecutors! Therefore follows, as the first *For* of reason for not fearing, an assurance of help; and then a second *For* of reason for speaking boldly—a positive promise of great success. FOR I AM

WITH THEE, AND NO MAN SHALL SET UPON THEE TO HURT THEE, or *to inflict evil upon thee.* Sublime repetition of the farewell left in Matt. xxviii. 20, which yet was no farewell! Majestic words, in the manner of the Most High God, who has said from the beginning so many times, "*I* am with thee—*I* am with you!" Such promises did not insure the Apostles generally against the suffering of many evils, and death itself (John xvi. 2)—in the case of Paul the keenest persecution, even unto stoning, was not excluded; but the word has *here* a more specific meaning for his testimony in *Corinth*, and gives a pledge: "No harm shall befall thee, in life and person, *here;* no hand shall be laid upon thee"—as the original runs. And we read the fulfilment. The mild Proconsul Gallio (brother of the philosopher Seneca) calmed the people, just as the town-clerk did afterwards in Ephesus; but not as the magistracy in Philippi, who yielded to the clamours of the mob of his enemies. Sosthenes is beaten (ver. 17)—but Paul goes free, and remains as long as he will; preaching unhindered and unhurt for eighteen months in this city! All this is under the control of the Lord; He suffers to set upon, or restrains from setting upon, His followers as He will. This is the great consolation even in the midst of the evil which is permitted.

Still more. Not only should no man hurt him, which to the Apostle was the lesser thing, but the true and essential encouragement is given to save him from all despondency—Thou shalt have much fruit with thy protected testimony. FOR I HAVE MUCH (countless) PEOPLE IN THIS CITY. Concerning Jerusalem the Lord said—Go hence, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me! But concerning *this* city He saith, I have much people in it—and that city is Corinth! We must consider a while what kind of a city Corinth was, to discern all the significance of these words. *This city*—the Lord does not so speak as if He merely would not mention the name, but for the sake of emphasis—*this* city, not only heathenish, but sunk deeper than others into the deepest abominations of heathenism, this basest and most notorious city of all that proudly bear the name in this dark world. He who in His humble life on earth limited Himself, for Israel's sake, to one small corner of the earth, and who had never seen any fragment of the wretched glory of Greece and Rome,—He,

the same Jesus, knows all things, and is everywhere present in His energy. Of Him it is true, that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, and through all cities—not only to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him (2 Chron. xvi. 9), but also that He may seek out and visit in His grace, for their salvation, all who in any degree turn their hearts towards Him, and, whether consciously or unconsciously, are prepared to receive Him. He who once on His way to the death of the Good Shepherd prophetically spoke, in His authority original and to be resumed, of the other sheep not of this fold—now terms from heaven "the children of God scattered abroad" (John xi. 52), in the blasphemous city of Corinth, a *people* which already belonged to Himself; because they were to be collected together and united with His one great people, which has now taken the place of the ancient revolted people of God.

This meant for Paul, sent to the people and to the Gentiles —"Behold, if thou must go from the Jews—shaking the dust from thy feet, and leaving their blood upon their own head—the Gentiles, to whom thou hast turned, will give both to Me and thee rich compensation. Many Corinthians have believed, many more will believe; so that it shall become a great Church: I shall have much people in this city." This says to all His messengers and disciples everywhere, and in all circumstances—"Be comforted: I have already those who shall be Mine own; I know and guard, I collect and feed, as the Great Shepherd, all who will believe on Me!" But it also contains its consolatory warning against precipitate judgment upon the ruin of the world. Many a believing Christian might have beheld reprobate Corinth with eyes very different from the Lord's, and might have thought that all the Apostle's zeal, labour, and patience were expended in vain—but it was not as man's estimate might think: the Lord looketh at the hearts of men. The man of Macedonia had not called the Apostle over to Macedonia alone. In all Achaia, and in regions beyond, souls were waiting for help. Athens had for the present proudly rejected the Gospel —but the equally proud and still more trifling Corinth concealed within herself a great multitude of people of the Crucified, soon to be revealed; for open and abandoned sinners are nearer to grace than the darkly wise and prudent. A foolish sermon of

the tentmaker—a man of the despised Jewish people, and by them cast out and persecuted—finds in this wicked city many believers. And so the great Church still, having to wage incessant war with surrounding impurities and corruptions, which invade her and more or less cling to herself, is yet a Church of the Lord, concerning which and to which the Apostle may utter the words with which he begins his first Epistle, 1 Cor. i. 2–9. Because among them the power of the Spirit had superabundantly demonstrated itself, he can call *this* Church pre-eminently the seal of his Apostleship (1 Cor. ix 2)—if not, like that of the Philippians, his joy and his crown. How many times did this word of his Lord concerning the much people in this city encourage and animate him in his zeal for the betrothed of Christ, that it might be presented to Him as a chaste virgin! (2 Cor. xi. 2.) For the great prophecy and assurance points onwards, beyond all conflict and perversion, to the glorious consummation—*I have already* much people.

VII.

TO ST PAUL IN BONDS AT JERUSALEM.

(Acts xxiii. 11.)

Again a fruitful period of the Apostle's activity;—according to the most probable reckoning, a space of about six years since the arrival in Corinth lies behind us. After a short abode in Ephesus, he went up at Pentecost to greet the Mother-Church in Jerusalem;[1] he then tarried a while in Antioch (we observe that he retains his connection with the chief cities); he then went through Galatia and Phrygia; and has now preached for two years in Ephesus, with great success, against all kinds of idolatry and necromancy. In the ancient metropolis of all the black arts he demonstrates the might of the name of Jesus,

[1] As ch. xviii. 22 must be understood in its "going up" and "saluting the *Church*"—this last always referring pre-eminently to Jerusalem. This is a fourth journey to Jerusalem; though only a short greeting in the calm circle of the brethren. Now it is *Pentecost* instead of Easter: comp. again ch. xx. 16.

with accompaniment of mighty miracles. Further, travelling through Macedonia and Achaia, the Apostle, urged in spirit, contemplated *Jerusalem*, and even already *Rome*, as the goal of his journey. In the way, hastening to Pentecost, he takes his farewell in Miletus of the elders of Ephesus, for he knows that he will not come again to them. Now he is in Jerusalem; holds friendly colloquy with St James and the elders; and, yielding to counsel, allays the mistrust of the bigoted Jewish Christians by a legal compliance in the temple. But this very circumstance excites, through a probably wilful misunderstanding, the wrath of the Jews: he is seized in the insurrection; and thus —according to his desire, though not in the way that he thought —an opportunity is given him for a *final* testimony to Israel in the metropolis. It is the last most important condescension of the abounding grace of the Lord, which appeals yet once more to this hardened and rejected Jerusalem. How the Apostle narrated his history and bore his testimony before the people, we have already seen. When he came to the word concerning his being sent to the *Gentiles*, all hearing was over; their rage burst forth; and only the Roman power could rescue him from the wrath of the Jews—bound still, however, because some kind of guilt seemed to fasten upon him. The next day he is brought before the supreme council in Jerusalem; and for the first time, though he has been in Jerusalem four times before. And it proceeds as if the council must give an account of the insurrection against this man, rather than as if he had to make his defence. They had this notorious and most hateful leader of the sect of the Nazarenes, this man who was once *their* Saul, before them, and under the protection of the Romans! After the Apostle, in consequence of *their* embarrassment, had begun the discourse; after he had reproved in the high priest the unrighteous blow, and had seemingly retracted in keen and severe irony his reproof; after he had, with great prudence and in perfect consistency with truth, avowed himself to belong to the Pharisaic orthodox Judaism, which held to the hope of a resurrection,—there was a disgraceful division and wild uproar in the council itself, so that the Roman captain had to rescue him from the hands of these most honourable men to-day, as yesterday from the rabble.

This was the day, on *the night following* which (as it runs

literally) the Lord came to him once more with a personal address. This was certainly an important crisis in the progress of the kingdom of God. The last fruitless testimony in Jerusalem before the people and the council, had resulted only in public exasperation, in the secret increase of their hardening, and in the more grievous exhibition of the unrighteousness which restrained the truth; but connected with this was the delivering up of the greatest witness of the Gospel to the authority of Rome, which for a while shows itself more just than Pilate formerly was, who surrendered all to the clamours of the people (ch. xxv. 16; xxvi. 31, 32). After the tumult, *worse* now on the part of the Jews, there is miserable disorder and dissolution in the council itself; on the other hand, a Roman warrant interferes for the Apostle's full protection. We would not push the significance of *these* occurrences so far as Baumgarten does, who regards them as marking a great historical change in the relations of Jews and Gentiles; to wit, that Israel was from this time dismissed (saving his future), and that a Gentile mission, a Gentile Apostolate, and a Gentile Christendom, was for a long period as it were exclusively to enter in.[1] Yet they do indicate a turning-point, at which it was most appropriate that the Lord's specific encouragement should be given to St Paul, so strangely placed as he now was between the two powers of the world.

Thus, in the *night* after this great day, in which the Apostle had done what his Lord had commanded him to do before the supreme court of his people, still dear to him in their blindness, had rebuked the "whited wall" with prophecy of judgment, and then in this last term of the Lord's forbearance conceded to the people their "high priest," and made a final attempt to lay hold on what was still good among them by appealing to the "Pharisees" in this half-heretic council to defend his doctrine of the resurrection,—in this night, when all the mighty feelings and thoughts of the Apostle's human soul were in strong agitation, concurrently with and amid the inspirations of the Spirit, and he was doubtless severely tried by a certain anxiety as to the issue of his complicated position—the Lord *stood* once more

[1] For, even at the end of the Acts of the Apostles, in Rome, St Paul begins again with the Jews, with his acknowledgment of the hope of Israel; and it was to the Romans he wrote that Israel should never be given up!

by him, to strengthen him by His recognition and promise. The brief word is not expressly connected with any mention either of trance or vision; only the *night* gives us hint of a dream or vision. But the Lord's "standing by him" [1] assures us of an actual manifestation, in some manner visible and audible, as in ch. xxii. 17, 18. Therefore we ought not and will not, like the bulk of expositors, rapidly pass over these words of the Lord Jesus spoken out of heaven, but give them their especial prominence in our exposition.

BE OF GOOD COURAGE, PAUL! FOR AS THOU HAST TESTIFIED OF ME IN JERUSALEM, SO MUST THOU ALSO BEAR WITNESS IN ROME. The manner and substance of these sayings from heaven, after the first at Damascus which had its own peculiarity, are much the same throughout: The ground of the command or encouragement is given by *For*, the great subject is ever the testimony, the course appointed for it is the same, and always the majestic *I, of Me!* There is something peculiar here in the mentioning *by name*, the first time since Damascus, and that the now prominent name of *Paul*. The unfavourable manuscript criticism will not persuade us to strike out the appellation; the naked "Be of good courage," so curt in the original Greek, does not seem to us enough.[2] This appeal was always connected with something else in the Lord's lips, either with direct address to the person, or with *It is I!* It is not, in the New Testament, altogether the same as *Fear not!* [3] which once at least in the apocryphal book of Judith, ch. xi. 1, is connected with it. (Tobit xii. 17, only in Luther.) Thus the Apostle's courage is rather strengthened, than his fear expressly taken away. His soul was not, indeed, at this time filled with pure confidence unalloyed by anxiety; his nature might well feel its infirmity, while as the "man in Christ" he was uttering his testimony in the light and strength of the Spirit; and, that being over, he must afterwards have felt it still more. His position was now—beyond anything that he had anticipated—

[1] Ἐπιστάς, comp. Luke ii. 9; xxiv. 4; Acts xii. 7, of angels; as in Luke xx. 1, Acts iv. 4, and xxiii. 27 (this chapter) of approaching men.

[2] All the critics, from Griesbach downwards, strike out the addition; Knapp alone leaves it undecided. The testimonies in its favour are not insignificant, and to our feeling something is wanting to the Θάρσει.

[3] Although in the LXX. the אַל־תִּירָא ten times (according to Kircher) is translated by θάρσει.

so confused and perplexed between the Roman authorities, the council, and the people, that the best prospect was a wearisome imprisonment, with moreover the danger of all kinds of malicious plots against him. How stood it now with his purpose, after Jerusalem to visit Rome also? The prudent thought of appealing to Cæsar, which was suggested by the development of the event, he had certainly not as yet pondered and determined on. As of his Roman citizenship, so also of the right of appeal bound up with it, he can make exceptional use only when the Lord's directing guidance suggested and required it. Thus St Paul was anxious, prayed probably this night for light and strength from his Lord, and he obtained his answer. But, on the other hand, we must not regard him as assailed by *fear*, as in Corinth; still less must we assume, what Schaff so strongly expresses, that "exhausted by many fatigues, overwhelmed with anxiety and despondency, he might lose sight of his plan to preach the Gospel in Rome." The "Be of good courage!" does not seem to us to go on such a supposition; but rather to carry with it a commending acknowledgment of the faithful servant[1]—So far *all is well, be still* of good courage! And the rather, as the reason given for the encouragement, before the promise, contains in itself a gracious acknowledgment.

As thou *hast borne witness* of Me in Jerusalem—that is, speaking after our common manner, a testimony of the satisfaction of his Lord and King with his conduct. *So*—strange that the force of this is almost universally overlooked—gives our Lord's own favourable judgment in confirmation of our exposition of St Paul's deportment recently before the council. St Paul did not commit himself in passion and precipitation when he rebuked the high priest, so that it was necessary for him to retract with the unimaginable and almost false apology—I knew not, or reflected not, that he was the high priest! We cannot think that, at this first most important defence of the great witness before the council, the grace which was at other times so abounding within him failed his spirit, and that the Spirit promised for such emergencies ceased altogether to guide him—so that he fell to the level of Ananias, whom he rebuked, in his human wrath! In truth, St Paul could not before this miserable council have so unworthily exposed *the cause of his Lord*,

[1] Matt. xv. 21, in the Greek εὖ precedes.

which was in the estimation of his enemies one with his own person, as to ask forgiveness for a judgment perfectly just! That would have been, at least in the eyes of his malignant foes, at once to impeach by his own conduct the bold avowal with which he had commenced, ver. 1. No, the Lord does not thus abandon His saints in the critical time, and suffer His representatives and messengers thus to fall. The Lord had stood by St Paul in the day, even as He stood before him in the night. Thus the Apostle had rightly and worthily *testified* in Jerusalem, as the Lord says. The appeal to his good conscience from the beginning was, in opposition to these miscreants and knaves, quite right. The cry that he was a Pharisee, that he held with those in the council who held the resurrection, was not a human expedient of craft to extricate *himself* from difficulty (against which the Apostle himself had before protested, ch. xx. 24), but it was the last condescension of merciful love, which the Lord Himself directed him to exhibit. The appeal to this party feeling within the council itself was a most legitimate and solemn protest against the sitting of unbelieving heretics in the midst of it—a protest against the verdict upon the word of the Resurrection given by those who already in their theory had rejected it. But it was more than this, it was a demonstration of supreme compassion and grace; the well-known Gospel of Christ, which was the real point of dispute throughout the proceedings, condescended to appeal to the one only existing feeling in the council of which it could take advantage; St Paul, in this last great testimony at Jerusalem, cries out all the more urgently the more vehemently they reject him—The true and genuine Judaism is nevertheless *on my side!* (comp. ch. xxviii. 20). Because they answered him only by blows, the Apostle's *prophecy* (not railing) proceeded—God *will* smite thee! and it not merely fell upon Ananias (who according to Josephus was soon afterwards smitten), but was a general denunciation upon all who fall under the just judgment of God.[1]

"*As* thou hast borne witness concerning Me in Jerusalem" means, certainly, "As praiseworthily and as rightly, not marring the influence of thy testimony by impropriety and defect. So

[1] This whole scene before the council has been most fully, and, as far as I know, more distinctly than anywhere else, depicted in my "Reden der Apostel."

must, *shalt*, and *wilt* thou also in *Rome* bear witness!" That which the Apostle in ch. xix. 21 had prosed to himself for the first time in the *Spirit*, not in his own spirit but through Divine impulse, is here confirmed by the Lord, as it is afterwards, ch. xxvii. 24, once more by the angel, when in the peril of shipwreck all prospect of its accomplishment might seem to be shut out. As thou hast borne witness, thou shall bear witness: the former, which had taken place, is the pledge of the latter, which should take place. "Thou shalt still *bear witness* according to thy vocation"—*this* is the powerful and essential *encouragement* which the Lord addresses to His servant, who in all his infirmity desired only to testify unto the death. In the two great capitals of the then known world, the city of God and the city of Cæsar (the latter the goal of the Acts!), he should bear and proclaim the name of Jesus. The city of Cæsar, the city of the world, had also its high calling and destination for the kingdom of God—alas, she fulfilled it but a short time, and soon basely fell from it! It is already *hinted* by the Lord that this imprisonment in the hands of the Romans was to be the means to that end; for the *as* and the *so* contain in this concise saying more than one meaning. As was the past, so *surely* will be the future—as thou hast *rightly* borne witness—and finally, as an undertone for the Apostle's reflection, as *bound* at Jerusalem, so also with these bonds in Rome! Thus there is set before the Apostle new labour in continuing tribulation, and *that* itself was real encouragement to the apostolical spirit of testimony.

"Bear witness *of Me*—to faith *in Me!*" (ch. xxvi. 18.) We have not yet remarked that this is not strictly according to the original, which means, "bear witness of *the things concerning Me*, My cause." It is not merely the common Greek paraphrase for the person, but indicates, by a fine and striking expression, as well the narrated account before the people as the maintenance before the council of the decisive testimony concerning Jesus in the doctrine of the *resurrection* (compare ch. xxv. 19 with ch. i. 22, iv. 2, 33). From the fact that the saying contains precise delicacies of Greek expression,[1] we

[1] Not only this τὰ περὶ ἐμοῦ, but also the *intenser* word διεμαρτύρω, as also both times εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ, εἰς Ῥώμην; which scarcely stands for ἐν, but used in the latter case like εἰς μακράν, ch. ii. 39, and of Jerusalem also for the sake of similarity.

might *suppose* (though no more) that the Lord did not on this occasion speak to the Apostle in Hebrew, but in the now to him current missionary language, *Greek;* and this would have its own affecting significance, besides confirming the genuineness of the personal address by the name *Paul*, as this was the Greek form instead of Saul. Be that as it may, the final emphasis of the whole saying rests upon the disclosed *must* or *shall* (compare ch. ix. 6 and 16), by which the absolutely certain *pre-ordained* future is indicated.

This was not yet the last time that the Lord spoke to St Paul. Besides the words preserved in 2 Cor. xii. 9, we read elsewhere of visions, manifestations, and revelations, the particulars of which are not recorded. These repeated revelations were a compensation for the lack of that intercourse with Jesus in the flesh which was the foundation upon which the other Apostles stood; and a continual strengthening of St Paul's confidence in the independent way which was marked out for him, and which to him was to be so peculiarly full of suffering. There was a considerable interval of test for his patience and faith between Jerusalem and Rome; but this word of his Lord was the pole-star to him in all the darkness of his way. It constantly assured him in every crisis of peril that there was an inviolable ordination concerning him:—that his life could not be sacrificed to the wrath of the Jews;[1] that his imprisonment should issue in public testimony; that the sea should not swallow him up, and the viper not do him harm. Therefore it was that, during this imprisonment, the Apostle wrote such letters of energy and consolation!

VIII.

TO ST PAUL IN HIS INFIRMITY.

(2 Cor. xii. 9.)

In the Epistles to the *Corinthians*—although we should not, humanly speaking, have expected such special confidecne to this church—the Apostle has most entirely exposed himself,

[1] Whose murderous counsel, in ver. 12, follows in miserable opposition to the Lord's appointment.

and his whole personality, to intimate inspection. He so fully exhibits his official vocation and work, the way in which God's power wrought in his words, and the effectual demonstration of the Holy Ghost as it was proved in the influence which he was able to exert upon others, that these two Epistles would of themselves furnish ample material, if properly drawn out and arranged, for a treatise with the title, "The *Apostle* Paul, delineated by himself." And, still more, he lays bare to these Corinthians the inmost merits of his most personal intercourse with the Lord, in a manner of which we find no other example. He presents his *entire* personality so fully as to make these Corinthians see that this great Apostle was by nature a man like themselves (Jas. v. 17); and thus gives us in these Epistles an impressive and most important example of the proper appreciation of the *personal character*, in opposition to the absolute authority of any office whatever, even the apostolical, which it is sought to *isolate from* that character, and make independent of it. And all this is perfectly natural; for what is the Apostle's aim? He would suppress and rectify the spiritual-carnal pride which was so conspicuous in the Corinthians; he would defend the authority and dignity of his own despised office. But how could he more fitly accomplish this than by revealing to them the power of God in his own weakness, teaching them humility by his own lowliness, rebuking and exhorting them, not by words only, but by setting before them the most direct and living *example* of his own life and experience?

In this we find the key for the interpretation of the strain and peculiarity of the Epistles to the Corinthians generally; and particularly a solution of the reason why we find in this place *that* word of the Lord which we now consider, and which is the only immediately spoken word of Christ recorded in Scripture between the Acts and the Revelation. St Paul must speak of the labours and successes which legitimated his office; but he would rather speak, in addition, of his afflictions. It is necessary that he should glory against them as a fool; but in his wisdom he glories after such a manner that God's glory alone results, and his own is brought to nought. He is constrained to tell them of high revelations; but he places beside them his own deep infirmity; and distinguishes so affectingly

the "man in Christ" from *himself*, that his absolute subjection and nothingness before his Master is the only result of all. It is in this connection, after the teaching which so wonderfully blends together in his own example humiliation and encouragement, that he relates for all Christians in common what (among other things) the Lord had *said to him* in the agony of his uttermost trials.

But—I hear the reader ask—have we really any right to place this word also among the proper words of our Lord Jesus from heaven? Very many expositors look at it otherwise, and regard it as merely an expression of an answer of the Lord through His Spirit within Paul—such an answer as any petitioner might obtain. But is it this, and no more? May we resolve the expression, "The Lord said unto me," into the mere suggestion of the Lord's Spirit, as if it meant, "The Lord inspired me with the conviction, and it was to me as if He had spoken?" Assuredly not, dear readers! The "man like ourselves" was also *peculiarly* favoured above other men, and stood in a nearer relation of internal fellowship than that would imply. When he simply relates this speaking of the Lord to himself, as something not unusual, he gives us plainly to understand that he had more than once received express and audible communications of this kind. And immediately before he had been speaking of visions, and revelations, and trances. And when he now gives us a view of his tribulations, he shows that his Lord had not been less near to him in them. It is true that we here approach the *boundary* where the personal direct address of the Lord, this time certainly without any vision or appearance, passes over into the Spirit's ordinary method of communing with our spirits, in which believers are continually receiving His words; and many child-like, simple souls may dare to say, similarly to the Apostle—Thus did the Lord Jesus speak to me. But still there is a difference: it was not simply thus that St Paul heard what is here recorded. Here, where he has just been speaking of revelations generally, he distinguishes plainly and expressly the Lord's, *to him*, well-known speaking; so that we must take the word as it stands—it was an audible word of Jesus to the Apostle.

In the severe conflict of profound suffering—which, at any

rate, the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan,[1] must indicate—he had prayed *the Lord* thrice for the removal of the distress; that is, according to New Testament and apostolical language, not to "the Lord God," but to the *Lord Jesus*, to Him who in the days of His flesh had thrice prayed to His Father—Take this cup from Me! Not, indeed, with the perfect resignation of Him who in Gethsemane learned and confirmed His obedience in suffering, for there might be some admixture of human impatience; but, on the other hand, not without the humility of importunate *supplication*, in which nothing more is required of us weak men than *this*—I will not let thee go, unless Thou help me! *Thrice;*—this we cannot regard as a mere phrase for "several times, repeatedly;" the Apostle would have been restrained from such a phrase by the thought that it might be understood as an intentional comparison with Gethsemane. That comparison does not occur to him; he simply relates what actually took place: thrice I prayed to the Lord—not to be understood of intervals of supplication, days or nights in succession, but of one continuous struggle in prayer. *The Lord* does not suffer him to cry a fourth or a seventh time; but He, the same to whom St Paul addressed his supplication, gave him at the third time the sublime answer. And that answer will be filled with a richer strength and emphasis to us all, for whose sake the Apostle has communicated it, if we regard it not merely as a Divine consolation inspired into the Apostle's soul, but as an express and definite word of the Lord from heaven.

Literally, according to the original: SUFFICIENT IS MY GRACE TO THEE, FOR MY STRENGTH IS PERFECT IN (THE) WEAKNESS. This decisive expression, the saving ordinance and rule of conduct, as it were, for all who are severely tried in the following of Christ, has first its special meaning for St Paul, but also a general symbolical meaning and design. Indeed, this *universal* significance is stamped upon the form of it (for the second clause is not a personal address) more definitely than in the earlier sayings of the glorified Lord; so that here also we discern a *transition* to the more ordinary communications of the Saviour to His people. That even a Paul was still in danger of

[1] The difficult interpretation of which, so far as it belongs to the question here, we shall subsequently consider.

being exalted by the superabundance of the revelations, and of preaching to others through the still remaining *gifts* of grace, while himself a castaway through the loss of *grace* itself, is a most keen and earnest warning, which St Paul's own person—with all its high prerogative of election, still a perfectly typical and *exemplary* person—impresses upon us all! The Lord secures him against this danger by *sufferings*, which must so bring home his *infirmity* to him that he can find no consolation but *grace*, and must for ever give up all glorying in that he had received from God. And this is to us all the way of grace and the method of our salvation. Are there sufferings which we procure for ourselves, and which we may avoid by avoiding the sins which occasion them and which they punish?—so there are also sufferings which the wisdom and mercy of the Lord imposes upon us without any specific guilt of our own, though for the sake of the universal sin of our corrupted nature. Are there tribulations which we may pray against, remove by fervent and persevering appeals to the Redeemer and Helper of our souls?—so there are also appointed and salutary burdens which shall not and must not be taken from us; although grace will establish, strengthen, and console the *spirit* under every tribulation of the *flesh*. For even the most keenly penetrating trial of the human spirit is essentially only a thorn in the flesh, in the nature which is flesh born of flesh. It is even questionable whether that which St Paul found so hard that he thought he could not longer bear it, did not consist in such so-called spiritual assaults of satanic temptation: he might, in harmony with his phraseology elsewhere, name them a thorn in the flesh. We might, indeed, almost say, that to bear the most painful tribulation in the body had become a light thing to the Apostle, through the discipline of grace; and that the counterpoise to high revelations would be trials which fell upon the true and inner flesh.

Be that as it may, and to decide *this* is not of moment, Christ's word retains its universal meaning for all those salutary afflictions which may seem to us intolerable, but which He has irrevocably ordained. He infuses His *grace*—so that we can bear them; and, not only so, the bitterest medicine becomes at last sweet in the good and gracious will of our Lord. My GRACE—is the word of His majesty and power, as well as of

His love and consolation. Luther thought to bring out the saying better when he translated—*let it be sufficient!* and we are loath to correct trifles in sentences which the Holy Ghost has made precious to so many. Here, however, the meaning is considerably affected.[1] The immediate *assurance* is more needed by the desponding than the exhortation and doctrine, and it is that which is *first* given. As the answer to the anxious question—"Am I then abandoned, cast out, rejected?" comes the fact, not expressed, but graciously *taken for granted*, that Christ's grace is already with the Apostle, that he *has* it, testified by Him who alone is perfectly assured of it. "I am merciful to thee! Thou hast My grace! What wilt thou more?" Even if the tempted man might not in his weakness be satisfied with that, which he was to learn and would learn, His merciful Lord declares to him the fact against all his doubt, as a truth beyond all his consciousness and feeling, *It is so! Thou hast sufficient* in My grace! The Lord places this word, as it were, in St Paul's lips, that He may utter it after Him in faith—"Yea, Lord, Thy grace is sufficient for me." Zinzendorf brings out, in his translation, the true exhortation—"Be content, that I am merciful to thee!" but the exhortation is all the stronger for not being expressed.

Now, as in almost every previous instance, the Lord speaking from heaven gives in the second clause the ground and reason of the first, by a sublime demonstrative *For*. That which He thus goes on to say and testify is no longer directly spoken to the Apostle; but it is given to him as a general saying applicable to himself, and placing him under a universal ordinance. And what a saying—doctrine and fact at once for Christ's kingdom of grace, in inexhaustible depth and comprehensiveness of meaning! For My strength—we hold fast this reading against Tischendorf and Lachmann, and this time even against Bengel. The latter thinks that if St Paul had written "*My* strength," he must also have added "in *thy* weakness." But why? The question is not so much what St Paul might have written, as what was fitting for the Lord to say, and what He actually could have said. "*My* strength" was alone appropriate; but "*thy* weakness" could not follow, for the reason already

[1] For, that ἀρκεῖ must be translated *sufficere debet*, *sufficiat*—is arbitrary and vapid, after the style of Rosenmüller.

assigned, that the saying is a universal one. That great student of Scripture seems to have afterwards bethought himself; for, in his translation of the New Testament, the "My" remains. Manuscripts and authorities are generally not decisive of themselves; here certainly not, where important witnesses are on both sides. The decision is finally matter of taste and feeling, of internal reasons. A recent English critic[1] says, that, unless he errs, the word was added for distinctness' sake, and to make the sentence coincide with the Apostle's subsequent "the power *of Christ*." We think, on the contrary, that this subsequent word of the Apostle, which appropriates to himself the word of the Lord, and repeats its emphatic "My," is in favour of the ordinary reading. We maintain that the Lord would have spoken not merely with less dignity, but with an obscurity which might easily be misunderstood, if He had spoken of strength generally instead of *His own* strength. The repeated "*My* grace, *My* strength," is altogether in harmony with the throne-style of His words from heaven, as we have heard it throughout. If He had said, almost descending from His dignity to an altogether general dogma, "For *strength* is made perfect in the weakness (or in weakness)"—it is true, we admit, that the Apostle would at once have been likely to understand it of *Christ's* strength; but to all others, in the long future of His kingdom of grace, for whom this word was to be preserved, this interpretation of it would not have been sufficiently obvious. Does not the saying thus run altogether in the form of a common *proverb*, especially with its striking apparent antithesis of opposite words? "*Strength* is fully approved, made perfect, in *weakness*"—is this, then, commonly *true?* The Romanist expositor Allioli, who clings to the Vulgate, "first of all" refers the grace and the strength to God, but then goes suspiciously further: "Moral strength, the higher life of man, is also meant, so that the words include the meaning that the higher life of the spirit, *virtue* in man, is brought to perfection by such tribulations; through the weakening of the old nature we attain unto the perfect power of the new life." Rightly understood, this is true; but still it may be misapprehended, and may be taken in *that* meaning for which Grotius has collected

[1] Alford, who sometimes concedes too much to German science.

several passages from the Classics.[1] This indefinite and general saying concerning strength in weakness may have, under the discipline of concealed preparatory grace, where there is no absolute distinction between what is man's and what is God's, a certain preliminary prophetic truth—but in the kingdom of Christ, where nature and grace are distinctly separated, it is no longer applicable; and as a rule in His kingdom it could not have been asserted by Christ. It would have been necessary that He should add, in order to obviate in His wisdom all misunderstanding and error—"In Me, and only in Me, is the saying true concerning strength in weakness." The opposite is true of His servants, in their conflicts under the light of His heart-searching countenance; and the warning must have been given—"*Your own* strength is weak even in the strong; it comes to its end in weakness, passes away, and comes to nought." And *this* is what the Lord does say in warning, when He declares, as we must understand the expression—"MY strength is made perfect in weakness!"

Now at length we have made full provision for a further exposition of this profound thought. The progress into the second clause thus testifies—My *grace*, the grace of God in Me and through Me for men, is POWER in them (Eph. i. 19, iii. 7; Col. i. 29). And what a truth is this! Who is sufficient to expound it fully? We can now only give prominence to its protest against all the misunderstanding and perversion which is too lightly satisfied with the profound word "grace," and denies it all its meaning. We mean all such idle resting in the consolation of "the forgiveness of sins," and the consciousness of justification, as forgets that this grace is perfected in the power of sanctification. Berlenb. Bible: "Grace is here *not alone* forgiveness of sins, but something that *works* in a man and overcomes his sins, though not without his suffering." This is according to the ever-needful word of St James—"And not by faith alone!" Assuredly, not the beginning alone, but the abiding ground of all strength of grace, is the firm consolation

[1] Of Pliny: Optimos nos esse, dum infirmi sumus. Of Seneca: Calamitas *virtutis* occasio est. Of Quintilian: Temeritas omnis animorum calamitate corporum frangitur. That a "self-collected, humble, and thus confident, boldness of spirit is strengthened in conflict"—can scarcely satisfy here.

—I obtained mercy! But it is most important to know and experience that this consolation is itself, and works, power in the soul; that he who rejoices in the grace of Christ has received it to that end, and can only thus find it sufficient.

Luther's translation—"Meine Kraft *ist in den Schwachen* mächtig" (My strength *is mighty in the weak*)—is very far from bringing out the weight and significance of this word of our Lord. It is not to no purpose that He orders the expressions with a threefold difference: not *in the weak*, but *in weakness;* not merely *mighty* (which is self-understood, as being fundamentally the same with strength), but *perfect;* not merely *is* perfect, but *is made* so. It is not only that the phraseological contrast "strength and weakness" must be retained; the expression gives another meaning, since it speaks not so much of the *weak* in common (which we all are, and always, of ourselves), but of particular circumstances and trials in which the *weakness* makes itself especially felt—precisely in the same sense as the Apostle presently, and frequently elsewhere, uses the word. In *weakness* (there is no article in the original), as in the element and domain of its working, the strength is perfected, approves and confirms itself perfectly. Zinzendorf: "It first becomes absolutely mighty." But this, once more, is not spoken (in the sense of ch. iv. 7) of the weak, earthen vessel of human nature generally, in which the superabounding grace of God works, but of the *perfecting* of its indwelling and penetrating influence, presupposed even at the beginning; and concerning this perfecting it is said for consolation, that it *only*, but also *certainly*, is brought to its consummation in weakness, in the path of trials and *suffering*. The power *is made* perfect, becomes consummate—that is, obviously, not in itself, since as power it is already perfect; but it absolutely approves itself, expresses its perfect energy and influence.[1] As Christ Himself reached the *It is finished* in the strength of God, through uttermost weakness upon the cross (ch. xiii. 4)—and He remembers this, now speaking from heaven—so through the continual energy of *His* strength in His servants a victorious perfection is wrought out, in the same way of suffering and subjection in weakness. And if it be Satan, or his angel, who causes the weakness and

[1] Bengel: omnia sua peragit: the reading τελεῖται or τελειοῦται makes scarcely any difference.

tribulation, Christ's *power* is victorious *over* him in all who receive Christ's *grace*, and who retain it in faith; that is, who count that grace sufficient, trust in it absolutely and humbly, and wait confidently for its full demonstration of its power.

St Paul himself at once makes the *application*, setting himself before the Corinthians and us all as a pattern: "Because it is so as the Lord *said unto me*—and that is sufficient for me!—*therefore* I will rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." How humbling this to the Corinthians, who gloried in the *gifts* which dwelt among them! What a lesson is here taught by supreme authority, through the person of St Paul—that to have *grace* is sufficient, and infinitely more than the possession of all gifts! The greatest danger, even for "men in Christ" (ver. 2), is ever that of—thinking too highly of themselves. The safest, rather the only safe, way for the most sanctified and favoured with special dispensation, is to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, whose salutary discipline will never cease; to place themselves among the chief of sinners, that they may receive the perfection of Christ's strength in their own weakness. The best answer for the natural mind, even of an elect Apostle, inclined to pride, and therefore exposed to despondency in the time of oppressive trial—given to him for the sake of the puffed-up Corinthians, and of all the downcast everywhere—and which, in the most gracious form of an almost enforced consolation, "Thou hast grace!" points to the victorious consummation of their power, as found only in the sufferings which crush in them all that is their own. It is a *most tender repulsion* of the urgent prayer that the salutary rod of discipline might be removed.[1] The supplication of his faith to the great Helper, in the time of his distress, was good and right—for what better can our weakness do through the grace of God?—but the answer comes down from heaven with victorious *power* into the depth of trial and discomfiture: "Ask not so vehemently and unconditionally that *thy* will may be done, the will of thy flesh, which is unwilling to suffer for holiness and salvation!" Albertini (sometime Bishop of the Moravian Brethren) very foolishly charges the Apostle, in one of his

[1] As v. Gerlach says, after Bengel (Benignissima repulsa, indicativo modo expressa).

sermons, with falling here, in Scripture, into foolish self-exaltation; but his own experience taught him to speak more correctly in what follows: "We have here a sample of the spiritual history and the spiritual discipline, not of St Paul only, but of all pardoned sinners. Everywhere glorious revelations, and rough sufferings to qualify them. Always *all-sufficiency* in the grace of the Saviour, and always *insufficiency* on our part!" St Paul knew well to teach the fruit and necessity of afflictions; but when they come in all their secret force upon his own soul, in order to make him (according to what had been predicted for him, Acts ix. 16) perfect as an elect vessel for the name of Jesus, he needs once more direct instruction and help from heaven. And this he received: the Lord uttered to him these words, from which he never afterwards ceased to derive strength. He repeats it here in the centre of his teaching to the Corinthians, who themselves specially needed it; but he also says it to us all, and leads us into the inmost mystery of the Lord's spiritual communion with our hearts—in which His grace and strength graciously encourage our weakness, in order to perfect in it His work.

IX.

TO ST JOHN IN PATMOS, AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS VISIONS.

(Rev. i. 11, 17–20.)

St John—a personality gifted and called in another manner than St Paul! All that may be established as to the difference between these two, both in their natural and supernatural birth; as to their several historical relations in their apostolical office, with all the important consequences which resulted from these several relations,—may very appropriately be brought into view here, when we are called to see and hear how the Lord comes and speaks to His servant John in Patmos. Not that we can now enter at large upon this subject; it is enough if we remind our readers—whom we suppose to be thoughtful students of Scripture—of its importance, as exhibited, for instance, in our observations upon the last chapter of St John's

Gospel. St Paul, although not without strong points of dissimilarity to St Peter, stands by his side in the energy of external influence: and both are thus in opposition to St John, whose spirit was pre-eminently inward and contemplative. The Apostles who were mighty in action and teaching founded the Church in the beginning from among the Jews and the Gentiles; but St John, living himself in profound heart-mysticism, who livingly combines together all that had been dialectically developed in detail, who sinks with his readers into the inmost centre of the fundamental principles of the truth (light! life! love!), speaking from the Lord's heart to our hearts—he, and only he, among the elect could have been the *Seer* of the New Testament. His calm and tranquil soul was the purest mirror for the reflection of those great *symbolic figures*, in which the Lord would close His words from heaven for all futurity, seal and subscribe the new Holy Scripture at its close, and expound what was still in arrear of Old Testament prophecy for His Church down to the end of its career—most plainly, though under a sevenfold veil—so that, in the process of fulfilment, history makes all His meaning clear to His believing people. The disciple, who gave not his name in the Gospel, here, on the contrary, mentions it three times at the outset, and once again at the end (ch. xxii. 8).[1] Not to discern the Apostle John in the writer of the Apocalypse, as well as in the Gospel, is a pseudo-criticism, the worst characteristics of which condemn themselves to every simple eye, and the best, most plausible characteristics of which are wanting in insight into the Divine plan both of Scripture and the kingdom of grace. For this plan, according to which the whole of Scripture must correspond to the whole process of the kingdom, would not have been rounded and complete without the revelation given to St John.

Once more *the faithful Witness* opens His mouth in a confirming conclusion of all; but words are not sufficient for this great close; it must be *shown* in speaking figures, just as the mysteries of God had been declared from the beginning by His servants the prophets. The final matter of all these final visions is the *coming* of the Lord, the Conqueror in all the conflicts of His Church; that coming which typical catastrophes precede

[1] The correct reading omits the name in ch. xxi. 2.

(Matt. xvi. 28). Shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, which was one of those comings—almost simultaneous with it, and yet *beholding* beforehand what he afterwards survived—St John received the Revelation, in which the Lord says—"Behold I come!"

Not under Domitian, but under Nero, was the Apostle banished to desolate Patmos,[1] for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. This island, as Bengel observes, looked towards Asia, where were the seven churches, surrounded by the three divisions of the world, and the capitals of the five subsequent Patriarchates. In this solitude, separated only in body from the worshipping community, and on that account only the more firmly united with it in spirit, the Apostle *celebrated the Lord's day*, the birthday of the First-born from the dead (ver. 5); his devotion had already raised him into ecstasy *in the spirit*, when this ecstasy was heightened, and this Sunday was made to him one of the especial days of the Lord. Let us not forget to observe the confirmation which this gives to the Church's Sabbath: St John does not fail to observe it, though alone. Jesus comes to him on His own day, just as in the beginning He had returned to His disciples on the recurrence of the day of His resurrection.

He hears a loud *voice* as of a *trumpet: not merely* like the voice of the herald proclaiming the coming of the King, as the word has been used in Scripture from Sinai downwards, and as, before this revelation, the trumpets of the day of judgment are spoken of; but the voice *speaks* to him immediately in intelligible words. The voice sounds *behind him*, so that his attention is excited to hear before any sight has too much amazed him. Affrighted enough, however, he turns and looks round him, and beholds a manifestation of the Lord. Whether the first voice proceeded from the Lord Himself, may admit of question; Ebrard denies that it did, and thinks that a heralding angel uttered it, who is also referred to in ch. iv. 1. But, after most careful consideration of the text, we cannot agree with him. To us it seems that *St John* in the *spirit* on the *Lord's day* needed not the mediation of any such herald: he needed

[1] Ἐγενόμην, just as before, "I *was* in the isle;" where we must not expound—I came, or, had come, like γενέσθαι, *e.g.*, 2 Tim. i. 17; Luke x. 32, xxii. 40.

only the first cry that he should see and write his visions; and that summons must have been the Lord's own voice on the day of the Lord. The "I will show thee!" afterwards in ch. iv. 1 is appropriate, as we think, only to the Same who at the beginning began to say (ch. i. 11)—"*What thou seest*, write!" The distinction of the "*first* voice" in ch. iv. looks *forward* to the voices which were afterwards heard, and means, The same first voice and no other; it marks the difference (for so much is true). between that first trumpet-like cry and the more qualified tone of the voice which *spoke* to him like the sound of many waters. And ver. 12 is similarly to be understood: St John turned himself round to *see* the voice that spake with him—that is, Him from whom it came—and he saw the form of the Son of Man, not of an angel; and that Son of Man continued to speak.

But the *first* word of this trumpet-utterance of the Lord was not, as the translation gives it, "I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last!" This is one of the many false readings which are the result of transposition in this book. How could this "I am" of the supreme majesty of the God-man have been uttered before the Apostle had become collected enough to see the Speaker, and had become really a seer? The first words are plain and simple as possible, though spoken with loud voice: WHAT THOU SEEST, WRITE IN A BOOK, AND SEND IT UNTO THE SEVEN CHURCHES WHICH ARE IN ASIA; UNTO EPHESUS, AND UNTO SMYRNA, AND UNTO PERGAMOS, AND UNTO THYATIRA, AND UNTO SARDIS, AND UNTO PHILADELPHIA, AND UNTO LAODICEA. This is the only correct commencement: *What thou seest*, that is, wilt see now and henceforth, what I will show thee. This is the plainest annunciation and beginning of the visions: the calling of St John to be the last seer in the whole series of the canon of Holy Scripture; although prophetic revelation of a lower degree may have continued in the Church of Christ. He should see and *write*, that it may be a book added to Scripture; the entire book being dictated by the Lord Himself, in the manner of things seen. But this book, without disparagement to its vast, far-reaching destination for the whole Church to the end of time, is, according to the law of prophecy, typically connected with the present time; it was, first of all, to be *sent* to the Seven Churches, which were specially elected to become types. We may well suppose that St John in the spirit,

in his solitary Sunday solemnities at Patmos, had been present with these his churches, and had regarded them in his earnest supplications to the Lord; so that this commission would graciously meet his own inmost wish and impulse to have some apostolical intercourse with them from the place of his banishment. The names are mentioned in geographical order from Patmos: Ephesus, the nearest; Smyrna, to the north, and Pergamos; bending lower into Asia Minor, Thyatira and Sardis nearer, and Philadelphia and Laodicea farthest removed. That with this geographical order there marvellously coincides a prophetic symbolical *significance*, we shall see hereafter, upon the indications given by our Lord Himself (ver. 20) of the *mystery* of the seven stars, candlesticks, churches. At present we remark only that, according to the *first* word of Christ, the seven epistles were to accompany the whole *book* as its special dedication; hence, in ver. 4, St John designates the whole book an epistle from his own hand, in which the seven immediate epistles are found inserted.[1] The solemn commission to *write* recurs at the most sublime passages of the book, ch. xiv. 13 and xxi. 5; compare the final conclusion, ch. xxii. 17. As the *first* place in Holy Writ where the word "write" occurs, Ex. xvii. 14, contains a Divine commission to Moses touching the destruction of the arch-enemy of Israel—"Write this for a memorial in a book" (in *the* Book, the great, complete Book of God, as 1 Sam. x. 25, Esther ix. 32, and in a certain sense, Job xix. 23)—so here we have, concerning the visions of *victory*, in the highest and last sense of the word (ch. vi. 2, xii. 7, 8), we have the command of Him who, as the Last, stands and will stand above the dust (Job xix. 25, in the right translation) to His servant, for His people—*Write!* Referring to all that had been already written by Divine commission, and that should yet be written (St John's *Gospel*), the Lord speaks of the whole plan of a *Scripture* to be completed—now from heaven, as formerly upon earth, when He pointed always to the existing Scripture.

St John heard a voice, which said—That which thou *seest*.

[1] Guericke observes, upon the blending, peculiar to this book, of the New Testament epistolary form with the Old Testament prophetic symbolical representations, The Lord Himself addresses epistles to the churches—and what letters are they!

The trumpet-sound had terrified him; but he could not otherwise than obediently listen, as long as the voice continued to speak. When the words ceased, and not till then, he turns round, not from his own impulse but in obedience still, to *see* that which he was to see—that is, of course, Him who had spoken! And he sees the Lord, *his* Lord, on whose breast he had lain; whom his more penetrating soul had discerned, when the rest discerned Him not, after the resurrection—*It is the Lord!* (John xxi. 7). He sees *Him* in His actual verity, as Stephen and Paul had seen Him, and not a vision representing Him; yet, as every manifestation of the Glorified Redeemer at the right hand of the Father must necessarily involve some medium of softening and concealment for the eyes of men, this manifestation to St John (probably the first *to him*) was of a peculiar character. The glorious appearance is surrounded with all kinds of figurative investiture, because a prophetic series of symbols is to be disclosed. Stephen beheld—as was appropriate in his circumstances—the "Son of Man at the right hand of God," in direct vision, as it were, almost after the manner of the future beholding; but to the receiver of the Apocalyptic visions, which were to wind up the book of Revelation by returning back to Old Testament prophecy, the Lord reveals Himself as He did to Daniel: hence here as there the expression, *Like to the Son of Man.* As in the midst of a wonderful, heavenly *temple:* instead of the one seven-branched *candlestick* in the old sanctuary, there are *seven* around Himself. These candlesticks are first beheld by the Seer, or, he mentions them first, because all that was to be beheld and recorded should find its goal in the Churches which they signified. In an assumed *symbolical* form and investiture, the particulars of which are afterwards again introduced for explanation, the First-born from the dead shows Himself as a faithful Witness: never should this, and what else is exhibited in the Revelation to be written, have been undertaken by the painter's pencil! The High-Priestly and Kingly raiment indicates, in condescension to human view, His dignity; yet the *talar*, which clothes Him round, is simpler than Aaron's rich variegated vesture; and its colour is not described, only that the most dazzling white of His head is distinguished from it. It may be self-understood, that the garment was only of resplendent white. The girding with the

golden *girdle* around the *breast* does not so much indicate (as even Bengel supposes) rest after labour, as generally the glorification of the human form, which is thus exhibited in a nobler and more dignified manner; for (as Ebrard remarks), the distinction between the upper and lower parts of the body is thus done away with. The head also and feet exhibit the glorification of the Human; though viewed in its aspect to human eyes. The head and hairs (scarcely put for the hairs of the head) appear here in the Son of Man like as in the Eternal, Dan. vii. 9, the Ancient of Days, before whom the Son of Man was brought. In His eyes burns the pure, judicial fire of the holiness of God. The metallic brightness of His *feet* does not refer to the destructive approach of the Mighty One, under whose footsteps the mountains melt; for, it is not the *burning* fire (any more than the *burning* eyes) which is here involved, but the *brightness*, as the connection in ch. x. 1 establishes. For the rest, it is quite consistent with this, that afterwards in ch. ii. 18, the *feet*, as such, indicate, at the same time, the approach to judgment. The peculiar Greek expression here is as much controverted by the learned, as the mysterious corresponding word in the Hebrew, Ezek. i. 4. The *voice* (that is, in which *what followed* was spoken; as St John must anticipate the entire description) must be interpreted according to the precedent of Ezekiel (ch. i. 24, xliii. 2; comp. Dan. x. 6). The seven *stars* in His right hand, corresponding to the seven candlesticks—scarcely (as Meyer says) like precious stones in rings upon His fingers—are freely suspended on or over it, as held and borne by Him, probably shining rather in a circle. We must restrain ourselves from any speculations which go beyond the text; it is enough that we have afterwards the Lord's own interpretation of these figures. Thus we must understand the two-edged *sword*, not *only* of the retributive judicial might of His word (Isa. xi. 4), but at the same time and generally, as in Isa xlix. 2, and Heb. iv. 12, of its judging and saving power in the Spirit (Eph. vi. 17). Finally, His *countenance* shines above all other brightness, whether of His snow-white hair or of His darkly-glowing feet, like the sun in its utmost power. Comp. Judges v. 31; Ps. xix. 6. The whole symbolical manifestation is exhibited in human, earthly points of resemblance; but in this form, it is the Lord Himself, the Eternal Living One,

with fire and light beaming forth from His heavenly glorification, as the sequel plainly shows.

The bosom-disciple, who had been an Apostle for forty years, the most confidential and familiar friend of the Lord in His present spiritual revelation, as well as in His former earthly intercourse, is now, when he beholds the well-known countenance of Jesus his Lord, clothed in more glory than the sun, cast down, in the fear of nature, recoiling before the might and majesty of God, at His feet—as one dead! Assuredly it was not *mere* fear of the amazement into which he was thrown; but St John, in his trance, experienced, at the same time, a rapture of recognising love, and sank in adoration at His feet, with the perfect consecration of His whole life, passing beyond all fleshly limits. Nevertheless, the fundamental feeling—for the first word of the Lord's encouragement retains its truth—was the *fear* which must overwhelm the saints, even the most favoured of them, when the Divine majesty bursts upon and around them from the dread secresy of the other world. It was far from being the full glory of the Son of Man, not to be beheld by mortal eye, which here appeared—and even St John, still having sin in him, must fail before it. It was far from being the full power of the Eternal Spirit, of eternal life in God, which breathed upon Him—and even he, who was in the Spirit, and lived in the Spirit, like no other man, must after the flesh die when it moves upon Him.

And He laid His right hand upon me—thus writes the seer in after times—and said: FEAR NOT; I AM THE FIRST AND THE LAST, AND HE THAT LIVETH. AND I WAS DEAD; AND BEHOLD I AM ALIVE FOR EVERMORE, AND HAVE THE KEYS OF DEATH AND OF HELL.[1] This is here to be otherwise understood than in the former passage, ver. 8, where St John, after the prophetic manner, followed his own testimony—*Behold, He cometh!* by introducing the Lord as saying, by His servant's mouth, *I am Alpha and Omega!* It is now the immediate voice of the Lord from heaven—from which the Evangelist had derived those previous words. Let each of us also fall at His feet, and pray—Lord, be merciful, and reveal Thyself to me! who does not yet, with the confidence of faith, for his own encour-

[1] The *Amen*, long added in the received text, is not authentic; though, to many, it seems confirmed by ch. iii. 14.

agement in living and dying, know Him, the Living One, who was dead for us children of death! We mourn over the dry and unfeeling souls who can bring their sophistical criticisms to such words as these, and write about this or that "author," or "Apocalyptist," having here given a specimen of his high style. It is not the style of a man which is here concerned, but the most sublime utterance of the Divine-human personal Lord Jesus—rising to a higher grandeur than they have ever assumed before, even in His words from heaven. The sublimity of the words, taken as a whole, and in their ineffable combination, using clear human language concerning time and eternity, living and dying, in the great and unparalleled testimony to that only *I* which has not its fellow—can scarcely be otherwise than marred by any exposition which they may receive. Yet, many may require a finger-sign to point the way for their meditation.

Once more, the *last* time in Holy Writ (for ch. ii. 10 is something different), the primitive and ever-new word of God to the children of men—FEAR NOT![1] This goes beyond that of Matt. xvii. 7, at the preliminary vision of the transfiguration. He who now speaks had long since accomplished his exodus through death unto life at Jerusalem, and had gone up, at the Mount of Olives, to the right hand of the Majesty on High; but He now looks down, as the Lord who is the Spirit, in the glorified, Divinity-pervaded corporeity of His human being, upon those who still have the gloomy gates of death before them. We may thus separate the words in the exposition: "I AM HE, the First and the Last"—and then we should expect the words of the risen Lord to be repeated, "I who was dead and now live!" But, before He thus speaks, He utters *here* a still loftier word, which testifies His eternal Godhead before, and in His humanity. He who, in the flesh, said to the blaspheming Jews, "Before Abraham was, I am"—and, in His prayer to His Father, spake of the glory which He had with Him before the world was, yet had never said, "I am God"—now at last utters that great word, in the saying of God by the Prophet Isaiah, "I am the First, and I am the Last, and beside Me there is no God!" (Ch. xliv. 6, xlviii. 12), or, "And with

[1] Twenty-one times (three times seven) we have counted it, as a direct address, in the Old Testament; and nine times (three times three), in the New.

the last still the same!" (Ch. iv. 1–4). For, the speech of this final Revelation is to be mostly taken from the old prophets.

The First and the Last, AND HE THAT LIVETH! This once more goes beyond the prophetic definition of the sole eternal Godhead, in a most sublime, most profound, and, at the same time, most intelligibly consoling expression. "The Living God" often occurs in the Old Testament; only in Gen. xvi. 14 (xxiv. 62, xxv. 11) does it approach, though without reaching, the absolute soleness of the idea as here used: compare its expansion in Rev. iv. 9, 10, x. 6. "The eternity of God is a *living* eternity. He is not the Absolute, because He is the most abstract, but because He is the most concrete—the *personal* God, who has a *heart*, who is *Love*, and, therefore, the life and the source of life to all. The Living killeth not that which liveth: therefore John need not fear."[1] The same Living One here, who, incarnate in Christ, WAS DEAD, and had risen again to an eternal life of God, in this *I* which here speaks, in the human person of Jesus Christ. As He was the living *from* eternity, before the incarnation, so now—*Behold, I am alive for ever*, TO ALL ETERNITY. This present saying reaches higher, and has a more Godlike distinctness, than that former one—*I am the Resurrection and the Life*—although the former was involved and included in the latter. Behold, behold, Jesus Christ is not a personage who has existed, who is gone beyond the limits of humanity; as, alas, many think, who know not the Living God, and dare to speak of Him as of other children of men. The personal continuance in being of every man who has once lived and is dead, is taken for granted here as the least thing; and then, the sole supremacy of this First One before the creation of the world, who was dead and liveth, His inalienable Divine life, is fully sealed. But He also *liveth it*, as He was dead according to the flesh of His human nature, in glorified flesh, in full and entire human-personal *bodiliness;* whereas, even the saved, who live with God, are still *dead* till the resurrection of the body, which alone will restore them to perfect life (ch. xiv. 13, xx. 5). Rothe misses the point of this passage, when, at the end of his otherwise beautiful sermons upon it, he asserts of Christ, that "He no longer works by the instrument of a sen-

[1] We gladly accept this beautiful sentence of Ebrard, more especially as we so often find occasion to contradict him.

suous nature, but by the energy of His *spiritual* nature and its organs, now consummated in Him; by the energy of His Holy Spirit." This marvellous doctrine of the reduction of the body into mere spirit, is not the Scriptural doctrine of the resurrection and the risen Lord: there is a third between sensuous nature and mere spirit; the spirit-penetrated, glorified corporeity, in virtue of which flesh and blood, in and besides the sacrament, are the "organs" of the operation of Jesus; and thus the Living One communicates His life, even to their incorporation in Him, to those who otherwise have no life (John vi.)

It is *on the Lord's day* that the self-manifesting Lord first gives His testimony to His resurrection from the dead. The Living One is no object of fear to His disciple; and the allusion to the death of atonement and conquest still more effectually dissipates His fear. As among the unbelievers, they speak of a certain dead Jesus whom the disciples maintain to be alive (Acts xxv. 19)—so speaks He Himself in this final testimony, which was to be a delaration in Scripture to all unbelievers for ever, first of all of His having been dead and of His living. I WAS DEAD—that includes *not merely* the body, but the entire human person; embraces His descent into the kingdom of the dead, into hell; and to this, therefore, is attached the word of the Conqueror—AND HAVE THE KEYS OF DEATH AND OF HELL. What death and what hell (comp. ch. vi. 8, xx. 13) mean in Scripture, we cannot now, upon the exposition of this word, fundamentally and from the beginning expound. Death, as the personified ruler of destruction, comes first; and then is added his domain and kingdom: both in their combination form the double expression, so frightful to the children of men, for the final and really existing object of their inmost *fear*. Christ has the keys of the kingdom of death, the might of which, on account of the curse of sin, shuts in and holds fast all: He has opened, and can open; He alone can deliver thence and set free; as He now is the Lord over the dead and the living, and seals His dominion. (Rom. xiv. 9.) But now to St John He refers only to His *having* the keys; He does not make them visible in His *hand*, which rather holds in it those who have been won from death, the angels of the Churches, victoriously as shining stars.

In this most essential word of introduction and explanation for the final revelations, before the command to write recurs,

the sum of the whole *Gospel* for mankind is condensed in the person of Christ:—O that it may be a living faith in us! Behold, a man like thyself, dead like thyself, who has been among the dead, and is now eternally living and giving life—behold, He it is in whom it is an eternal truth and reality, though a boundless mystery, that the true God hath given Himself to death for thee, lost man. Say to Him, with St Thomas and St John, in the faith which He Himself demands and offers—My Lord and my God! and then thou shalt, without fear, secure from death and hell, become partaker of His life and of His glory, even to all eternity!

And now, after the great "I am!" had announced Him as the Utterer of that first voice, the first commandment is resumed from it, *to write that which was seen*—the writing now taking the first place in the sentence. WRITE, THEREFORE,[1] THE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN, AND THE THINGS WHICH ARE, AND THE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER. This triple description, which first of all excites attention to the comprehensive perfectness and most certain reality of the contents of the Book to be written, may be understood according to the three dimensions of time: What thou hast *hitherto* seen (the glorious manifestation described from ver. 12 onwards)—the things which *now are*, and which are disclosed with an "I know," must also be set down by thee, that is, the condition of these present churches as exhibited in the Epistles, chs. ii. and iii.—and the things which shall be hereafter, as they are typically involved in these Epistles, and as they will be seen in all the following visions, down to the new Jerusalem, on the new earth, under the new heaven, down to the eternally decisive, "*Blessed are*"—"*But without are!*" This would give, in a certain sense, three divisions of the Book, unequal, indeed, as to their extent, but in their substance, strictly corresponding to each other: first, the appearance of the living Lord—then His seven Epistles—then the continuous epistle of what remained to be shown (with which ch. iv. 1 might agree). This would, at the same time, involve the thought, that what was to happen would go on in the immediate process of development (shortly, ver. 1), from the then circumstances of the Church as symbolically exhibited by the seven churches. We will not reject this exposition, but

[1] The οὖν, which Luther omits, thus obtains its emphasis.

rather hold it fast, as demonstrative against every false view which would discover in the revelation of St John, not the whole of progressive history, but merely the things in the far future which will take place immediately before the Lord's coming. Still, as the pregnant language of prophecy admits often of more than one interpretation, we would also more simply understand, by the triple description (as probably St John did, before his deeper penetration into the word), a merely parallel description of the same thing. "The things which thou *hast seen*"—may comprehensively mean (in harmony with ver. 11) only, "What thou now, and from this time *seest*." But that which is shown to the Seer to see, is no phantasm of a dream or poetical invention. It is most absolute reality in the condition and process of things upon earth, as also before the counsel of God in heaven, especially after the revelation here of the otherwise secret powers and energies which operate upon this world from the other: hence, "thou shalt see *the things which are!*" But, finally, this that was seen and already existing, refers collectively, not so much to the then present, as to the things which *should come to pass* from that time onwards —so that "hereafter" is not opposed to the preceding "things that now are," but is no other than merely the prophetic expression for the Future. Thus, similarly, the third is only a designation of the whole, with which ch. i. 1 and iv. 1, and also the corresponding conclusion, would better agree. And it is easy to see that the former interpretation, which lays stress on the connection with the *present* and development from it, is included in this: the *reality* of the *visions* of the *future* (as we may most briefly combine the three expressions in their true meaning), indeed, presupposes the development of the future from the present. There is no other actual future than that; therefore, there is no other prophecy than that which connects itself with, develops, and typically sets out from, what *already is*—thus showing what, though it has yet to come to pass, *exists now* in God's counsel, and to the opened eyes of the Seer, who beholds internal and external realities.

This view of the previous sentence most appropriately prepares the way for its continuation, which at once sets out with an interpretation of the figures which had been seen in their *reality*, with an explanation of the *typical* meaning of the seven churches

first-named. We may either take it as in the accusative, following the sentence before—"Write the mystery," etc.; or regard it as a new sentence—"The mystery of what thou sawest is as follows: the seven stars *are*," etc. The sense, in both cases, is the same, and the words run: THE MYSTERY OF THE SEVEN STARS WHICH THOU SAWEST IN MY RIGHT HAND, AND THE SEVEN GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS.[1] THE SEVEN STARS ARE THE ANGELS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES; AND THE SEVEN CANDLESTICKS ARE THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

The significance of the number Seven in Scripture is well known. Although stamped upon sound, and light, and other patterns of things heavenly upon earth, it belongs, with the number Three, essentially to the upper kingdom; and has indicated, ever since the festival of the seventh day at the end of creation, "the number of the perfection of *Divine* possibilities." The Twelve, the Forty, or Thirty, on the other hand, correspond rather to the creaturely in itself; and this will at once teach us why the *perfect manifoldness* of the New Testament people of God, the Lord's Church, the *Twelve-number* of which is also found afterwards in the Apocalypse, and seen in the New Jerusalem, is here at first exhibited in the Lord's own presence in His sacred number *Seven*. Inasfar as the Lord's *people* is derived, and grows, and becomes, from the ground of the creature, it is unfolded in twelve stems, and enters, finally, through twelve gates into the Jerusalem of the new creation. But, inasfar as the Lord's *Church*, lighted by His light, shines in His temple and sanctuary from the beginning before Him, it is exhibited in the seven churches. To this corresponds a historical and eternal reality; but whether the Twelve and Seven have, in any sense, a literal value, or are only symbolical numbers for more or less manifoldness in unity, will be easily decided, as it respects at least the Seven, by the specially directed Epistles.

That the seven *candlesticks*, as the extension and unfolding of the seven-branched candlestick in the old sanctuary, and mentioned first in ver. 12, are the foundation of the whole symbolism in this place, is quite clear. Originally corresponding

[1] Instead of "and *of the* seven"—for the candlesticks seen are themselves also the mystery. Such incorrectness of language, and change of construction, are designedly and significantly frequent in the Apocalypse.

to the *seven spirits* of God (ch. i. 4, iii. 1, iv. 5, v. 6), they then represent those which are enlightened and kindled by the one Spirit in His manifoldness; just as the shewbread represented the people prepared by God's nourishment, and placed before His presence as acceptable. Now, because these candlesticks, standing before the Lord in His light (nevertheless, according to the inwardness of the New Testament, not so much before Him and He far over against them, but He being in their midst), are already, in some degree, intelligible to St John from the Old Testament, their special signification is reserved for the close; first comes now the therewith connected seven *stars*, the *mystery*[1] of which previously required explanation. We learn what they mean from the fact that, elsewhere in the Old and New Scriptures, the kingdom of God upon earth, the heavenly kingdom, is compared with, or likened to, the upper heaven. We could not, and would not, write here a treatise on Biblical typology and symbolism, and must content ourselves with the most concise interpretation. When the Lord, in Matt. xxiv. 29, speaks in the language of the Old Testament of the "heaven-church," the stars in that heaven are no other than "the heads of the congregation, and teachers"—for which Dan. viii. 10, 11, and further Rev. vi. 13, viii. 12, xii. 1–4, may be compared.[2] As, in the above passage "host of heaven" (which expression itself thus occurs in a double meaning), the *stars* correspond to the *angels* (Job xxxviii. 7), as their domain and dwelling, this simply of itself decides who the *angels* of the *churches* in our lower, reflected church-heaven must be: they can be only *human* persons typically described by this name. It is not necessary to have recourse to learned parallels from the constitution of the Jewish synagogue,[3] nor to think of *messengers*, *appointed officials* of the then existing Asiatic churches.[4] But no more

[1] Μυστήριον, in apocalyptic language, is equivalent to יְדֻרַשׁ —secret sense of the letter; comp. ch. xvii. 5.

[2] See on the passage of St Matthew, in the "Words of the Lord Jesus," vol. iii.

[3] As that ἄγγελος etymologically corresponds to the official who led the prayers, who was called שְׁלִיחַ צִבּוּר.

[4] As Ebrard, from ignorance of the typical relation between angels and stars, has erred. It seems to us impossible that the meaning "ambassadors," which only first occurs elsewhere in the New Testament, should be the meaning in this book, which speaks so much of ἀγγέλοις as angels

must we spiritualise in a manner which is out of harmony with the entire character of the Apocalypse, and make them poetical personifications of the Church and its common spirit!! The important question, whether, at that early period, one of the presbyters had the pre-eminent place as bishop, is easily settled if we remember that the *angel*, or president, or leader of the church here singled out by the Lord—that is, that one personality in whom the spirit and temper of the church was represented and most perfectly impressed—by no means must be regarded as bearing an official title pre-eminent over the rest. Suffice, that every *congregation* had—so far as it is here viewed as one whole, characteristically and peculiarly isolated—as its own specific character, so also some one personal representative of that character. In the college of the elders there was certainly everywhere one who was prominent, without priority of rank, and who was well known by that preponderance, at least to Apostolical eyes. And if even this had not been the case, the Lord might have shown to the Apostle whom He meant, and to whom the letter was to be sent; though this, as not being of importance to futurity, and therefore a subordinate matter, was not to be written in the book, any more than the names of these "angels" generally. Thus, we understand these angels of the churches to be persons who stood before the Lord's view as the representative leaders of the Church, with or without prominent office, but in prominent spiritual position, and, therefore, assumed to be the receivers of that which was to be said to the Church.[1] They are by no means collectively the "teaching order," or, "the eldership," or anything of the kind, but actual individual persons. Not therefore, however, "quasi-guardian

The *fiction* that messengers came to John in Patmos, to whom the epistles were to be committed, is most inappropriate for the seeing of the things which *actually are*, and introduces something *commonplace* for the explanation of the *mystery*. Finally, who could ever say—Write to the messengers who will carry the epistle; instead of—to those to whom it was to be carried! That in every epistle the messenger himself is addressed instead of the church, is not so "natural" as it is assumed to be, even if he was viewed as a representative of the presbytery.

[1] In this we quite agree with Zeller (Monatsbl. Beuggen. 1848): "that predominant (single or collective) teaching or ruling personality, whose spirit, example, and work exerted a main influence upon the spiritual condition of their church and their time, and which figured the church either in a good or evil sense."

angels" of the churches, since their typical designation as angels has nothing to do with the idea of guardianship; but, in the profound and yet simple allusion, the significance of the spiritual and ecclesiastical ruling ministers of the Lord in His congregation, the true heads and princes of the Church, so regarded and esteemed by Himself, was to be shadowed out by these *angels* of the churches, which, indeed, is, and must ever be, a *mystery*.

And now, finally, for the *seven churches* themselves. It is certain at the outset that the interpretation of the mystery cannot be restricted to those seven churches then existing in Asia Minor. Certainly St John, according to ver. 4, sent *to these* "seven churches *in Asia*" the whole book, with the seven Epistles at the head of it. This was according to the command which he received, ver. 11; when, however, as a kind of hint of another signification of these names and addresses, the geographical note "in Asia" is *not* found.[1] But here in ver. 20, where the Lord interprets the whole typical symbolism of His first manifestation, even the article is wanting, according to the best reading, and it runs: The seven candlesticks are *seven churches*. Again, afterwards in the Epistles, the sevenfold appeal calls upon him that hath an ear to hear what the Spirit saith *unto the churches*—the seven-number being wanting, and "the churches" signifying simply—The entire Church of the Lord. Accordingly, we must admit that there is a symbolical principle of interpretation underlying the whole, however difficult it may be to apply that principle to the individual cases. And the Book, as ch. i. 1 in its superscription says, is from the beginning (and not merely from ch. iv. 1 onwards) *prophetic* for the future. How would the seven churches be a *mystery*, if nothing was prophesied under their several names?[2] How would they then correspond to the seven candlesticks, in the midst of which the Lord walked (which presently is mentioned again, ch. ii. 1), and their angels to the seven stars? For the Lord dwells in the midst of His whole Church, and

[1] It is found in Luther's translation, following an incorrect reading.

[2] Steinheil (Glances into the Apocalypse, Basel, 1857) observes that the text does not say so. But it most surely does! Bengel, who with all his penetration sometimes strikingly fails, very erroneously refers the "mystery" *only* to the stars!

holds all its "angels," in all lands and in all times, in His hand. Thus, most incontrovertibly, as we have above expounded, this number Seven of the congregation is not alone a *typical* counterpart to the Twelve of the tribes, but it is here placed first in the *prophetical* perspective,—a prophetic type of that which was to take place in the succession of time; while, on the other hand, the twelve tribes indicate only the manifoldness of the people of God in their unity. We may in a certain sense compare with this the seven parables in Matt. xiii., placed in a similar prophetic background; only that now, in the present much more perfect development of the Church, containing the evident germ of all the future, the prophecy is incomparably more special, concrete, and plain.

The historical basis is the actual position and character of a selected number of the churches of Asia Minor, that district where St John had followed in the footsteps of the Apostle of the Gentiles, the preparer of the way, regulating all its affairs from Ephesus as a centre.[1] Rich life was there, but also perversion and corruption commencing and actual; war of the Spirit with the flesh; conflict of the Church of the Lord with the world and its Prince, in all stages of victory or commencing fall. For even apostolical power and vigilance were not sufficient to release the Church of the beginning from the process of development in human freedom; even the Apostolical Church, in this immediately following stage, which we may term the Johannæan, bore in it, concurrently with its strength of faith and faithfulness of love, the beginnings and types of all future apostasy and corruption, down to the Laodicean lukewarmness of the last days. For this, the territory of the church of Asia Minor, so variously made up of peculiar characteristics, was a most apt and appropriate emblem; and hence it was the historically existing, and not arbitrarily chosen, type of all the future.

It follows from all this, as indeed from the fact of these Epistles being sent to these churches, that the words of praise and censure, of consolation and exhortation, which were appropriately addressed to each of them, will approve themselves applicable in all similar circumstances of the progressive

[1] Israel retires for a season altogether into the ground of Gentile Christianity, for the scope and aim of the Apocalypse.

Church. This is even the plain and obvious meaning which the Holy Ghost, in this relatively very comprehensible introduction of the dark book of prophecy, suggests to all individual souls. The churches which rise *successively* are in some sense always simultaneously existent also, though not always stamped so distinctively as in these seven types,—even as "invisible heart-churches," as Meyer expresses it. Nevertheless, this does not exclude the fact, that these characteristics and main features of the development are exhibited in the *periods* of church-history, and that to point to this in the background is the main design of the *prophetic* word—as in the case of the seven parables it was but involuntary, so to speak, and subordinate. For, as we said there, the history of the Church is no other than the Church's progressively-developed doctrine concerning itself, its own revelation; so we may here still more distinctly assert that the stages and forms of the development which exhibit to us in miniature its condition in its course through time, are stamped with historical necessity upon that course on the greatest scale.

The Lord's glance, everywhere having the ground and the final consummation in view, beheld in these *seven* churches of Asia Minor—though there were other and not insignificant churches there—a complete and self-contained symbolical circle. There were many various elements intermingled, as we shall see, in each individual example; yet in each there is most evidently a fundamental feature, a main characteristic. Every Epistle is comprised under the same fourfold arrangement: "What saith," with a title of the Lord coming first;—"I know thy works," with a disclosure of its condition, and praise or blame;—exhortation, consolation, threatening, variously expressed;—finally, in each case, the promise for hearing ears to *him that overcometh*:—and this uniformity will make the variety all the more intelligible. Each several title of the Lord at the beginning borrows something from the preceding manifestation, though not following the precise order of the description; even the "keys" of ch. iii. 7 looks back to ch. i. 18, as the comprehensive name to the seventh, ch. iii. 14, looks back in its meaning to the whole. Only the *voice* and the *face* are appropriately left not mentioned again by the writer of the Epistles. The concluding promises point back directly, in the first four, to the

ancient Scriptures, and in order: to the tree of life in Paradise; death (although now the second death!); the manna of the desert; and David's typical kingdom. They then leave this course, and exhibit an ever more *nearly approximating* appearance of the Lord as Judge. From the beginning it was almost everywhere —I will *come* (ch. ii. 5, 16, 25); but in the last three it comes strikingly nearer and nearer: read together ch. iii. ver. 3–5, ver. 10–12, ver. 20, 21. This last observation refutes the notion of Ebrard, that only the first four "churchdoms" are in historical sequence, and that the last three will appear at once in the end.

The reader may expect, after this necessary exposition of ch. i. 20, as an inevitable introduction to the seven Epistles, that we should give our own exclusively prophetic interpretation; but this we are not inclined to do. This book is intended rather for edification, than for the assistance of a few to find the depths of knowledge which are only to a few attainable. Moreover, we must confess that we have not attained to any absolutely *sure* understanding; in all previous interpretations, not excepting those which have been thoroughly versed in Scripture and in history, we have found some coinciding commencements of presentiment indeed, but no established and irrefragable conclusions. Bengel, it is well known, maintained that the seven churches have *no* prophetical meaning, and Hofmann denies any such meaning, at least for the whole of church history; we think otherwise, as already hinted, but do not presume to expound the Spirit's mystery as already known. It is not our vocation to add one more to the abundant chronological tables of the corresponding periods in church history, certainly not to *contend* on such a question as this.

Thus much, however, is plain to our apprehension on a general view, that in *Ephesus* and *Laodicea* are exhibited the first and the last ecclesiastical period. Ephesus, the central church of the Apostle John, in his consummating period, the labouring, enduring, Apostolical Church, which condemned and put away the evil and the false, yet already in a transition to the leaving of her first love;—therefore the removing of the candlestick from its first *place* is set threateningly in view. *Laodicea* (the *name* appears in all cases significant, and here means—where the people rule and judge) is, with equal certainty, the church as at the last time altogether fallen from

love, lukewarm, self-complacent, blind: the vast broad state-church, blending all things together in a so-called Christendom, before the presence of the Lord who, standing at the door, as the *Amen* yet once more faithfully testifies and exhorts, and can save and preserve those who sit with Him at the table, and are to sit upon His throne, only by chastisement and discipline. What lies between this beginning and this end, admits of less clear demarcation in detail. The most definitely marked are Smyrna, following the first, and Philadelphia, preceding the last, and the time of which stretches through the last. The former signified the post-apostolical Church, which is exhorted to fidelity unto death in the midst of fearful persecutions of the risen Lord. *Philadelphia* (brotherly love!), holding fast the word with the open door and little strength, and therefore itself protected from the great hour of temptation,—may surely exhibit to us the pure *united evangelical Church*, the time of which, whatever others may say, has already commenced; and to which the name of the City of God, of the alone true and pure Church, is held out at least in promise. Only *Smyrna* and *Philadelphia* are not rebuked, as only Laodicea is not commended. The three intermediate churches are, in the stronger intermixture of their character (as church history corresponds to it), less individually discernible in their *demarcation*. Whether actually in *Pergamos* (tower) is shadowed out the witnessing Church dwelling in the midst of pseudo-churchdom, and the *high* (Cæsardom and) Popedom, which alas was not untarnished—that is, the beginnings of that witnessing Church—and whether in *Sardis* the Reformed Church, fallen down to a name without truth, and to only a small remnant of faithful, first orthodox and then rationalist—we cannot venture positively to pronounce: certainly a place belongs to the *continuous* old-catholic churches (with and after Pergamos). These find, indeed, their type in Thyatira, that is, the believing, serving, working Christians among them; if, namely, we rightly consider the whore Jezebel and her idol sacrifices, the threatened judgment, the *true* authority to feed the nations promised to the overcomer. But enough: we reserve the rest for the exposition of the details; and leave it to the Lord to reveal, in His own time and way, to every one what may do himself and others service—being for our own part far from asserting that what we have to say is incontrovertibly true.

X.

THE SEVEN EPISTLES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

(Rev. ii. iii.)

That which these Epistles, placed thus in the forefront, demand of the reader of this prophetic book of history and mystery—to wit, *self-examination* before we presume to hear and interpret the things that shall be!—we earnestly commend to every student of this Apocalypse generally; and to every reader of this little book, which professes to expound only its commencement as containing the immediate words of our Lord. The whole Church of Christ, every particular church, and every individual believer, should constantly lay bare the heart to the word of this great Searcher of hearts with the flaming eyes, of this Judge who cometh with the two-edged sword of His mouth —*I know* thy works! Every one must receive from Him the exhortation and appeal which, while it warns and even threatens, is yet full of the strongest encouragement. Thus these Epistles correspond with the words which begin and end the great prophecy of our Lord yet upon earth—See that ye be not deceived! Watch always! What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch! (Matt. xxiv. 4; Luke xxi. 36; Mark xiii. 37). Hence Rev. xxii. 11, 12, returns back to the same injunction.

That is an incorrect exposition—pervading Bengel's school, and otherwise common—which refers the address to the *angel* of the church alone and as an individual.[1] The significantly running "*He* that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith *unto the churches!*" is decisive against such a limitation, as also the transition to the more comprehensive *ye* in the application, ch. ii. 10, 24. Nevertheless, so much is true, that in the "angel" the position and consciousness of the church belonging to him is essentially represented and inwardly concentrated; therefore all exhortation was to touch him first, and then in him and further through him the church. Consequently, every such president or ruling person, from the minister

[1] As, *e.g.*, in Bengel's New Testament; we read on ver. 2: "Thus this man must have had a penetrating understanding!"

of the smallest cure to the general superintendent of the whole district, every one who is thus responsible for the rest, must specifically examine himself whether and in what way that which the Spirit saith to *his* church affects himself individually. Consequently, also, every theologian who would be an expositor of the revelation of Saint John "the divine," must not rapidly hasten over this commencement, given for his own self-examination; he must not consider it all his duty to investigate and treat of the relation which the Epistle had to the angel of Ephesus, or Smyrna, or the rest. Let us, with such a hearing ear as this, hear the words of the heavenly Epistle-writer through the Spirit!

UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS WRITE; THESE THINGS SAITH HE THAT HOLDETH THE SEVEN STARS IN HIS RIGHT HAND, WHO WALKETH IN THE MIDST OF THE SEVEN GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS. The metropolis, and central church of Lesser Asia, opens the series; where, in the very seat of idolatry, superstition, and sorcery, the flourishing plantation of the great Apostle of Heathenism had come under the immediate care of St John. The *name*, the historical derivation of which is obscure, might be prophetically interpreted *The Beloved*, *the Desired;* or *the Sender*, which would more aptly note the distinction of the great "Apostolical" Church of the beginning. But all this is undefined, and has no bearing upon the exposition. Nor are we to refer this to *Timothy*, who was only for a time an "evangelist" to Ephesus (2 Tim. iv. 5, 9), and as it were an apostolical delegate for the full establishment of the Church; not to mention other reasons which, when we reflect further, turn our thoughts away from him. The personalities of the historical basis retreat into that obscurity in which it has pleased the wisdom of God that the specialities of the early Church should be wrapped, in order that the permanent canonical word written for us might more clearly shine out. Thus it rather imports us to behold and hear *Him* who speaks to the Ephesian angel, and who prefixes to the first Epistle the *first* comprehensive title—I, the supreme Pastor of *all the* churches! After the manner of the old prophetical, Thus saith the Lord! He utters His majestic I, though Himself speaks in the third person; yet this is all the more emphatic after the preceding manifestation. He *holdeth* the seven stars in His right hand,

and this in the original has a strong meaning; who by the might of His right hand *holds them fast*,[1] ruling and defending them, that they may not fall from His hand, and that no man may pluck them thence. Even Sardis and Laodicea are still in His hand; with all their severe rebukes, they are not yet cast away! A candlestick may indeed be removed out of its *place* (ver. 3)—yet only to another; the seven candlesticks as a whole cannot be extinguished before Him. But that comes only of the grace in which he *walketh* among them: He visits, cares for, and guards all in particular—as to every candlestick there might appertain many lesser lights, scarcely glimmering in their feebleness. He who walketh *in the midst* of the seven churches is the same who promised that wherever Two or Three were gathered together in His name, He would be in the midst of them! In this, at the same time, consists the *unity* of all believers and of all churches in the one Church; as this unity, testified here first for Ephesus, was acknowledged in the Apostolical Church. Alas, that the isolated churches of later times have, in the darkness of their pride, forgotten that the Lord walketh among all the candlesticks, in all churches, confessions, and sects which rest upon the one foundation.

I KNOW THY WORKS, AND THY LABOUR, AND THY PATIENCE, AND HOW THOU CANST NOT BEAR THEM WHICH ARE EVIL; AND THOU HAST TRIED THEM WHICH SAY THEY ARE APOSTLES, AND ARE NOT, AND HAVE FOUND THEM LIARS. Thus upon the one sure foundation which God in Christ hath laid, this seal is engraven—The Lord *knoweth* them that are His! The *first* prayer of His little company addressed to Him ran—Thou, Lord, knowest the hearts of all! (Acts i. 24). How should not He know them, who walks among them, who dwells in their midst, whose light alone enkindled the stars and keeps them shining? But because the Searcher of hearts speaks here as also the coming and warning Judge, He mentions only—while He means the ground of the heart—the *works* with their absolute evidence, as they are always mentioned in connection with the judgment: the fruits for which He will ask, the gain which He will look for. There are works seemingly good, but He means not these; they are the genuine, substantial, and worthy works,

[1] Κρατεῖν from κράτος is elsewhere used in the sense of *hold fast*, *preserve:* for example, ver. 25 of this chapter.

to which are opposed the mere conceit of an imaginary faith. Works, which are valid before the Lord, are found only where there is *labour* or diligence; and further, these are only where there is *patience*, not merely in suffering, but in all *perseverance* generally in the sense of this scriptural word.[1] Parallels in matter and word are 1 Cor. xv. 58; 1 Thess. i. 3; Heb. vi. 10. How many would fain satisfy and appease the Lord with so-called "works," who must hear the further question to their shame—But where is the toil and labour of *love*, as the demonstration of the genuineness of the work of *faith?* where the perseverance in fidelity, the patience from *hope?* It is not that the earnestness of this persevering maintenance is to be sought in the later maturity of the Christian life; we see rather here, that this test is applied to what may be termed youthful Christianity, to the Apostolical Church—as generally the Epistle to Ephesus is adapted to rightly established beginners. For, as we hear again in the conclusion, it is the fresh, pure, beginning of separation from the evil world, its sin and lie, that is threatened with the warfare with opposers and seducers. And then comes in the word—And I know that thou *canst not* bear those that are evil, although thy patience *beareth* much![2] It is quite a different thing to bear *evil* in the sense of 2 Tim. ii. 4: as the necessary corrective of a patience which receives all suffering, and which otherwise might degenerate into mere unholy weakness, there must always be bound up with all true love a hatred *against* evil (Rom. xii. 9), and consequently a holy intolerance so far against all the doers of evil. We must actually, for the sake of truth, not be able to bear the least imputation of such bearing with sinners as tolerates and is content to have any fellowship with their sin. *That* inability to bear is a high commendation in the sight of the Lord, and stands here prominently among the first-fruit virtues of His first community. Finally, there are at all times, and there were in the beginning also, seducers and teachers of error who came forward with very specious pretensions; but they

[1] In conformity with this order of the thought, each of the *three* words has the pronoun. We would not therefore, with many, strike out the σοῦ, that labour and patience might be brought nearer together.

[2] Ἀνεξίκακος, according to Hesychius, ὑποφέρων κακά. The adversaries must be really withstood, though it may be with meekness: they are not to be tolerated and borne with as such.

were to be *tried*, tested by the true standard, to see whether they were what they pretended to be. The text speaks, with reference to the time in which there were still true *Apostles*, of the false ones whom the New Testament often sets before us; St Paul, who was greatly beset by them, prophesied of their coming to Ephesus, Acts xx. 29. The testing of these false apostles, so that they might be found to be liars as they were, is by no means only a "matter for the Bishop"—as the simple Romanist Allioli says, in his "approved" exegesis; but it is, according to 1 John iv. 1, the duty and prerogative of every Christian man. The sheep may themselves test the shepherd, whether he be a stranger or not.

Still more perfectly exhibiting His meaning, and still dwelling on the good fundamental principle which is graciously acknowledged, the Lord concludes this first part of His address to Ephesus: AND HAST (or RETAINEST) PATIENCE, AND HAST BORNE FOR MY NAME'S SAKE, AND HAST NOT FAINTED. Patience has the honour of being twice mentioned, for it is the decisive grace (ch. xiii. 10, xiv. 12); as St James says, she must have her work perfected, must fully prosecute and finish the good work of faith: Jas. i. 4. The words defend themselves on both sides against misunderstanding: that the work, the work of love in patience, may not be interpreted in a sense contrary to holy truth and rigid purity, there comes first the *not* bearing with the evil, the testing and rejection of the false; but then, on the other hand, that this may not be pressed in a spirit opposed to love, there is the *bearing* of the evil and injustice which the wicked inflict, and that in its only genuine spirit—For *My* name's sake! This embraces both at once and in one, as well the love of Christ which impels a man to suffer, as the truth of Christ for the maintenance and profession of which a man is ready to suffer. Let every Christian and every Christian Church look in the glass here presented *to him* by Christ, and ask whether the Lord has found the works of *such* patience accomplished? As the seeming antithesis — Thou hast borne, although thou canst not bear—most plainly exhibits how it is rightly to be understood, so also in the still more untranslateable words of the original which follow—I know thy labour, but thou hast *not* laboured.[1] The same word is

[1] Τὸν κόπον σου—καὶ οὐ κεκοπίακας.

used in another correlative meaning, in the second clause: but it is not so much, as Zinzendorf says, "Thy labour has not been heavy and tedious, thou hast done it willingly," as, "Thou hast not become weary in thy toil, thou hast not sunk under thy work."[1] As nothing so much tends to produce dejection, and to destroy the perseverance of patience, as the conflict with false apostles and brethren, so it is certainly the highest praise of the *first love* of the beginning of the apostolical time, that it had preserved its fidelity in protesting truth and in suffering love.

Nevertheless—alas, this nevertheless follows! "Thou hast not been weary; thou hast laboured and had patience; thou hast for a while held out both in the not suffering and the suffering: but now thou beginnest to be weary and to relax!" Alas, if such a word as this must be spoken in the Lord's first address to His first church—and the history even of the apostolical age shows us the justification for it—who is there that can repel and decline the same heart-searching declaration? Who among us has remained uncontaminated and blameless in his first love? "Let the righteous smite me in kindness; it shall be balsam upon my head," spake David, the type, through the Holy Spirit (Ps. cxli. 5); and, verily, here the alone Righteous rebukes and smites His own with the excellent oil of everlasting love! First comes the full and unsparing praise; and not till then the equally just blame. And when that censure comes, it begins in the gentlest, mildest expression—which, however, on that very account is keenly penetrating—and only after that does the increasing severity of the inevitable threatening follow.

NEVERTHELESS, I HAVE AGAINST THEE, THAT THOU HAST LEFT THY FIRST LOVE. As the Lord directed His disciples that the brother should speak to the brother, if he have ought against him, so does He condescend Himself, in all the greater majesty and conviction, to say—I have somewhat against thee! He that hath an ear to hear, let him hearken when the Lord has anything against him—let him return and reconcile himself with his Lord! Do we not perceive that it is His *love* alone which seeks and finds wanting the love in us? Can any

[1] Compare the same Greek word in John iv. 6; and similarly Gal. vi. 9, ἐκκακεῖν.

one more touchingly rebuke than by commencing with the complaint—Thou no longer lovest me enough? Indeed, from the lips of sinners this may be a selfish and unrighteous demand; but when the love of Him who thus rebukes is firm and certain, and proves itself even in the manner of the rebuke, He has verily in strict right this charge to bring. The inmost, deepest root, the *faith* presupposed in ver. 2, which is the source and impulse of works, is not now mentioned or laid bare, because it is self-understood to be involved in the charge. The necessity of the doctrine and experience of faith had been pre-eminently set forth by St Paul; the Lord Himself, after He had spoken in the same strain while upon earth, now that He speaks from heaven lays more stress in His phraseology—like St John, whose pen He put into his hand elsewhere for the same purpose—upon *love*, the power and fruit of faith; in order that no man in His church might fall into the false perversion of the doctrine of "faith *alone*." Twice only in the Seven Epistles (to Pergamos, ver. 13, and Thyatira, ver. 19) do we find the word faith; and in the rest of the Apocalypse only in the two comprehensive and strictly connected fundamental passages, ch. xiii. 10, xiv. 12.

Ebrard understands by the "sacred fire of first love," which had declined, "*not* their love to Christ, but their love to one another"—but in our opinion incorrectly. As if such a separation were conceivable; as if love to Christ could be maintained in work and patience, while love to the brethren was wanting! As we have understood the whole, the praise of vers. 2, 3 was not deserved simultaneously with the condemnation of ver. 4; but the commendation speaks of a *beginning* which had not been sustained, of the same abandoned *first* love. But thus much is true, that when that love which is the energy and living power of faith, and which in its profoundest depth unites in one the love of God and man, of the Lord and of the brethren, begins to relax and decline, its coldness is first seen and made manifest in the external offices of charity (Matt. xxiv. 12). From the weakening of brotherly love, and concurrently of that love to all men, even enemies, which is kindled on that hearth, and is ever sustained from above, flows all apostasy and backsliding: therefore the Lord's convincing word seizes us by that lack, which we first become

aware of ourselves—indeed only in order to disclose the damage and deficiency of faith which that very lack indicated. If we do not love the brethren, and all men, perfectly, *whence* is that but because we no longer love the Lord perfectly? For, it is only the one *love of Christ*, poured into our hearts by the Holy Ghost in order to our love in return, which can urge us to show love to our brethren and fellows in pardoning mercy, or at least in redeeming love. It is not in vain or without significance that "*thy* first love" is spoken of. It is not only to shame them by reference to the past,—that which thou formerly hadst; but it is emphatically—*My* love hath not left thee; but thou hast forsaken, hast let go, this love of Mine which had become thine.

The history of the Church from the beginning is a thousandfold recurring commentary upon this unspeakably significant word—the *first* rebuke of the Church from her Lord in heaven, and penetrating the hearts of His people below! The special individual church-history of all hearts, as spread before the Lord's eye, testifies that something of this relaxation of the first love has befallen *every man*, even the Apostles in some degree, and multitudes of others much more fully and miserably. Sanctification does not in any soul reach its perfection without the standing still and sometimes the going back: this is, alas, a law in the kingdom of grace, in which human freedom is not abolished. But the ceasing of the first love does not, properly speaking, consist in the abatement of the powerful and happy feelings of the commencing period, the purification and softening down of which, rather, belongs to the strengthening and deepening of grace; but in the weakening and *growing faint* of the energy which sustains the work proceeding from faith — as ver. 3 preparatorily intimated. Genuine love is not a feeling, but a willing and a working. When that grows exhausted, there may indeed be—as was the case in the Apostolical period—a continuance of the working and conflict as *against* the world, of the witness and maintenance of the truth. This may actually seem to increase and become more zealous; but it will be no longer of the genuine character; it does not go affectionately *into* the world to win its victories, because it no longer proceeds from the brotherly love which burns vigorously upon the enclosed hearth, and

which rests upon the common love of each to the Lord.[1] The church in Ephesus is not yet wanting in pure *doctrine;* the false apostles are repelled, and will be so; nor is it wanting in sharp discipline, the wicked are not borne with, but are handled with increasing severity.[2] *But* all these manifestations are internally connected with a lack of truth and spiritual vigour, of sacred and divine *life.* The external too-much conceals before human eyes an internal too-little; but the Lord discloses it, and keenly pierces the heart of His Church —Thou hast left thy first love! As if He would utter the words once spokento Israel:—*I remind thee of* the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when Israel was holiness to the Lord, and the first-fruits of His increase (Jer. ii. 2, 3). Remember thou through My reminding!

REMEMBER, THEREFORE, FROM WHENCE THOU ART FALLEN, AND REPENT, AND DO THE FIRST WORKS. Call to mind the first days of thy good beginning, and deeply reflect. For *Sardis,* which represents a new commencement, the same exhortation is repeated, ch. iii. 3. How were ye then so *blessed!* writes St Paul to the Galatians (ch. iv. 15). Even with the increasing severity, which speaks of an actual fall and a new repentance, how gracious is the evangelical preaching and enforcement of this repentance—on the ground of grace once more offered, a grace which had been already received and experienced. It was *thy* first love, glowing then so strongly and blessedly from My love, which thou hast not held fast! Herder writes too much in the modern sentimental tone, though not without truth: "The whole Epistle comes, as it were, from the paradise of innocence and love. The mother could not more tenderly remind the child, nor the bride her beloved, of happy times gone by which have not returned!" He then goes on, with less justifiable exaggeration: "As if this voice of love would come stealthily, after abounding praise, to the subject of that which was yet wanting; and that is spoken of as what might

[1] And worse in later times, with the zeal of the Confessions against brethren united even in faith, without the uniting principle of a living oneness with all members in the Lord's one body.

[2] And this will show, in comparison with Pergamos presently, vers. 14, 15, and the following churches, that the First Epistle was not thoroughly and *exclusively* meant of the Apostolical Church, as a one-sided prophetical interpretation assumes.

soon be repaired—Remember how it was with thee! And is it better now? And then new praise follows for more abundant encouragement." No, this is not the spirit of the rebuke! This is not the sweet relish which the bitter medicine of the intermingled REMEMBER! leaves upon our thoughts. Its solemn and searching general tone has made it a piercing word of thunder, which the Holy Spirit has used among all fallen churches and souls, even those which have worse fallen than Ephesus. What a history has *this* text of Scripture had in the secrets of men, where the Lord is now carrying on His judgment of grace! Thou art FALLEN—that means a real and actual fall, though only at first in the ground of the heart, and but little made evident in external things. And FROM WHENCE? From the full, rich grace of the new life in the love of God; in a certain sense, therefore, it is a worse fall and more perilous than the first *fall of man*, of which the Lord's words remind the church of Ephesus. There is something true in the doctrine of the Irvingites concerning a great apostasy of the original church, the "catastrophe of a second Fall;" but the fanatical error which has caricatured this historical truth, and perverted its meaning into sad extravagances, is plain in the words themselves. Where does the Lord speak of the loss of spiritual gifts, of the disruption of ecclesiastical order, of the abandonment of obedience to official dignities, and all those other matters in which these strange people behold at once the guilt and the punishment of the first church? The Lord rests His charge upon very different grounds; He rebukes the angel with the church; He does not merely refer the congregation back to the discipline and form of a forsaken constitution, but to their first love; He does not teach, in the Corinthian manner, the distinguishing value of miraculous gifts, which are not even mentioned here, any more than in the whole Epistle to the Ephesians (although there were such great miracles performed there, there is no mention, even in ch. iv. 11, of workers of miracles!); He preaches, simply, a renewed REPENTANCE, as in the beginning. This preaching of repentance, indeed, with which Christianity began, as did the Reformation, and which is evermore preached on every relapse of churches or souls, is something very different from *those* means of grace which, in our days, even Lutherans,

[1] Stunden der Andacht, 81.

like the Irvingites, appoint in the church as false physicians. Not from without inwardly, and from above downwardly, but from within outwardly, through return to first *love*, the hurt of souls is healed: this cannot be too diligently remembered, and earnestly enforced.

As love is not merely a delectable feeling, but a labour of the dependent and devoted will; as faith is not merely a thought, but an impulsive and abundant spring of good works; so the Lord will recognise no repentance but that which is confirmed in the doing of the FIRST WORKS. In this He requires, as Tholuck says, "the energy and strength of the works of first love." *They* must be the proof of thy change of mind, and return to God. These thou *canst* present, *if* thou dost repent.

But that is ever left with human freedom; Christ's wholesome, disciplinary, faithfully inviting and chastising grace, puts force on none. OR ELSE I WILL COME UNTO THEE (QUICKLY), AND WILL REMOVE THY CANDLESTICK OUT OF HIS PLACE, EXCEPT THOU REPENT. The deepest emphasis falls upon the *repetition* at the close of this *Except!* It seems at first to strengthen the threatening; but when we lay it to heart, it rather softens the rigour of the simply conditional threatening. It goes on to say—*Only* if thou repentest not, will this judgment befall thee! Wilt thou not turn it away? I will come *unto thee*—thus, with evident difference, the preliminary judgment, first upon Ephesus alone, is indicated; thus the Lord *cometh*, in all ages, to judgment upon men individually, as well as to His churches. These Epistles speak, each of them, of this; and, as we have remarked, with progressive distinctness unto the last and perfect judgment. The "soon" which has been placed here, also may have been falsely inserted from later passages (ver. 16 and ch. iii. 11)—yet we would not positively strike it out, since it holds good of every such threatening, and is true even of the slowly coming judgments. We would further remark that, as our Lord announces His coming as a first typical judgment upon Jerusalem, so now, in these Epistles, He speaks in the same manner of His coming to *His Church*. Threatening of judgment, as actual *threatening*, is ever and absolutely necessary, and from the beginning could not be spared. The revelation and utterance of such, not merely threatened, but actually accomplished, judgments of the Lord

—accomplished upon many churches of the great Church—is the removal of the candlestick. Literally taken, it does not mean an overturning or extinction of the light; but the expression (which is *moving away*, as in ch. vi. 14) simply purports the *displacing* from where it stood—to *this* place a testimony of guilt and punishment—and thus the grace is renewed in another place.[1] Ephesus did, indeed, once repent, even if not with all her might, and, therefore, the judgment was restrained. But then "the subsequent desolation of the city of Ephesus" has something to do with the typical-prophetical threatening;[2] although the true fulfilment came long afterwards, in the destruction of the whole of the first Oriental churches by Mohammed. Indeed, this threatening of the removal of the candlestick, intelligible without much exposition, has its universal meaning, and is, by the Spirit, applied in many ways to the churches.

He who threateneth hath a gracious meaning, and turns His threatening almost immediately to consolation. For Ephesus the name is preceded and followed by, is wrapped up in, praise. At the first glance it is similar to the words of the prophet Jehu to king Jehosaphat, "Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God" (2 Chron. xix. 3); but here there is much more grace, BUT THIS THOU HAST, THAT THOU HATEST THE DEEDS OF THE NICOLAITANES, WHICH I ALSO HATE. Their fall from first love was not so deep and incurable but that their concurrent zeal against those who had still more deeply fallen might be acknowledged. Thus, the Lord says here, The Nicolaitanes—*them* indeed thou shouldst not love, and in false love tolerate! Thy hatred against their false works is good; it is itself something that may help thee to improvement and conversion; for it is something remaining of

[1] The expositors who regard the Epistles as directed only to the angels, are obliged here—because the lights are the churches themselves—to resort to strange shifts. Bengel: There will be an angel without a church! Rieger: The Church is the light of the teacher.

[2] This is not (as Ebrard says) a confusion of the historical and prophetic meanings, because God's government does further exhibit and stamp the types in history itself. The village into which Ephesus has sunk (Aja-Soluk, ἅγια θεόλογος, or θεολόγου) stands as the type of fallen and desolated churches!

thy first strength and purity. The Epistle makes mention of this matter as a prop, leaning upon which the fallen may rise and re-establish themselves. Again, it carefully speaks (more precisely than the Old Testament, *e.g.*, Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22) of merely hating the *works*, and not the persons. These *Nicolaitanes*, whose evil works are plainly manifest, need no temptation to reveal them, as the false apostles previously. What concerns their historical relations, the learned may decide when they can; to us all such matters are subordinate. Certainly they were, as vers. 14, 15 show, a kind of undisciplined Gnostics or false Theosophists, who, under the proud pretext of higher knowledge, gave the reins to the flesh, and perverted the grace of God into licentiousness. Whether the name, as the Fathers thought, was derived from their founder Nicolas (him mentioned in Acts vi. 5!) can neither be maintained nor denied with confidence; but it appears to us, as compared with *Jezebel*, ver. 20, much more probable that Nicolaus is only a translation of *Balaam* (ver. 14), and therefore no other than a symbolical name. But this would not permit us to say, "that sect bore in prosaic reality the name of Nicolaitanes"—for had "Jezebel" a name corresponding in actual fact? We think that, in the everywhere mysterious, symbolical style of the Apocalypse, where besides the names of the churches no other historical names occur, actual "Nicolaitanes" can hardly be assumed to have existed. Nicolaus means "conqueror of the people;" Balaam "seducer of the people:"[1]—this is plain enough as the signature of such people, of whom ver. 14 will speak more particularly. We only add, for practical use and application: Hate thou only with true earnestness all abominations of the fleshly, impure, proud—and be thou, through *such* opposition, warned back into pure and holy love of the Spirit. Deep repentance of those who for their internal backslidings are punished goes hand in hand with the abhorrence of the sins which show themselves in others. Thou hatest what *I also hate*—the Lord acknowledges, probably

[1] We cannot see why, according to Ewald and Gesenius, another etymology (the latter gives בַּל *not*, not of the people, a stranger!) must be sought. Fürst rightly remarks that even for the name of a place, רִבְלָה, the connected form בְּלָעָם occurs in 1 Chron. vi. 55. The exposition in Hofmann, that the angel's wife was Jezebel, and consequently her true name sufficiently well known to him, appears to us too *historical* and unapocalyptical.

not without reference to that Old Testament passage, already quoted, in which Jehoshaphat was rebuked—Shouldst thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord? But the Lord does not hate those who hate Him; but, as He commands us, only their works.

The *promise* to the *overcomer*—so suggestively the same in form throughout, yet varying in each case the matter—is the conclusion of all the Epistles—to give assurance that it is the purpose of grace to inflict salutary chastisement, and by its severest threatenings to encourage and strengthen the soul to overcome in the great warfare. This evangelical character of the Epistles is to be all the more clearly apprehended and impressed upon the mind, because the predominant judicial rigour which reigns throughout the book of Revelation must *by it* be interpreted and understood. In these promises the *thou* everywhere ceases; and its place is taken by the "*whosoever*," so specifically characteristic of our Lord's earthly prophetic office. We know well the attractive words—Whosoever cometh to Me! whosoever believeth on Me! whosoever believeth and is baptized! compare Rev. xxii. 17. Whoso heareth—whosoever will come! this is the consoling little word of promise, which keeps open the door of grace to every man to the end of time. But with this we must connect another *whosoever*, which establishes the condition, and makes room for the promise—Whosoever hath ears to hear, let him hear! This word—also a usual expression of the Lord—occurs in the first Epistles before the concluding promise; in the last four before it.

HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES: TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH WILL I GIVE TO EAT OF THE TREE OF LIFE, WHICH IS IN THE PARADISE OF MY GOD.

As formerly Jesus demanded for His *parables* hearing ears in order to understand them, so here in His figurative prophetical addresses. The expression is now condensed and strengthened thereby: the *ear* is more solemnly and spiritually spoken of; and "to hear" is not now added. *Whosoever* hath the ear of the inner man opened and attentive to the words of God—whosoever has it still open, or opens it again—shall in every Epistle hear something for himself; for each of them, apart from its special significance *for the churches*, is addressed to all

men generally and in common. Let us not deny or forget the specific prophetic meaning; but let us not, while investigating that, neglect their general lessons, which would be the greater evil. We must not point the sentence as if the prefatory address referred *only* to the following promise; this is opposed by the change of the form in the last Epistles. All that precedes and all that follows must be heard by each, because the Spirit saith it to the churches. This hearing is ever the way to the attainment of the promised reward of victory. THE SPIRIT saith—hereby this *last* personal utterance of our Lord Jesus from heaven passes over into speaking through the medium of the Spirit, as it continues throughout the book; it must be understood, that here particularly the Spirit is meant as the Spirit of prophecy. Probably, He who appeared as in ch. i. did not continue to dictate the Epistles, standing visible still as He did at the first, but uttered their words more inwardly to the seer; notwithstanding, there is a distinction in this book between the immediate speaking or dictating and the prophetic inspiration elsewhere. Assuredly, even St John would not dare, otherwise than by express inspiration of the words, to send to the churches Epistles of such a form and of such contents, clothed in such a style of supreme majesty. Thus it was only transitional and intermediate between the speaking of the Lord and the speaking of the Spirit; and at the same time immediately personal in its particular kind.

The Lord speaks of *overcoming* absolutely, without saying whom or what; just as elsewhere—Ask and it shall be given! without needing to specify *whom* the petitioner is to ask. The Lord's sayings from heaven do not begin an altogether new language; but presuppose the style of thought and words which had been prevalent in His Church from the beginning. The overcoming which He refers to stretches beyond death; it is perfected in death, as the common language of the world in Christendom has learned to say of the departed—He has conquered all! If we would begin here at the close of Scripture to develop the meaning of this sublime expression—reaching from the height of heaven to the deepest abyss of hell—it would open up the whole of inspired Revelation. St John speaks elsewhere (1 John v. 4) of a faith which overcometh the world; in his Revelation (ch. xii. 11) we read of an over-

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coming of Satan; comp. 1 John xi. 14. But the world and Satan are also within us through sin; we overcome them, however, through the might of Him who hath loved us and overcome for us:—thus the final promise in the seventh Epistle holds out to the church which had sunk the lowest the same prize of the highest victory. This first promise does not extend so far as that last; it begins with that first thing which the Lord promised to the thief on the cross, the bliss of Paradise re-opened by His death, that is, the blessedness of an uninterrupted life in God's presence. The expression is figurative so far as it is derived from the primitive history; but there is a mysterious reality corresponding to it in the heavenly regions, as 2 Cor. xii. 4 gives us to understand. Who will venture to say more, when St Paul could not utter the unspeakable words? "The Paradise[1] of *My* God" (according to the right reading) is spoken by Christ as the Forerunner and First-born according to His humanity; compare ch. iii. 2, 12. This manner of speech is—excepting John xx. 17—peculiar to the Apocalypse, in which it is remarkable (as Bengel has observed) that, while sometimes the Father of Christ is mentioned, God is never called "Father" as addressed by men; and He Himself promises to be their *God*, ch. xxi. 3, only as the fulfilment of the Old Testament word. This has its reason in the profound reverence and the holy rigour of the spiritual combatants to whom this book is written; and also in the return to Old Testament phraseology, which thus is made to coincide with the New. The wood or the tree[2] of life in Paradise glances forward by anticipation to the close of the whole, ch. xxii. 2, 14–19; as almost all the objects of the promises at the end of the Epistles reappear later in the book: the second death, ch. xx. 6, 14, xxi. 8; the new name, ch. xiv. 1; power over the nations, ch. xx. 4 (xii. 5); the white garment, ch. vii. 9, 13; the book of life, ch. xiii. 8; the new Jerusalem, ch. xxi.; the sitting upon the throne, ch. v. As the manna, ver. 17, is termed hidden, so the sure interpretation of all these glorious realities is reserved for experience; but when that ex-

[1] There can be no reference here admitted to the *lower* Paradise in Hades (which alone the thief could understand at first, whatever other meaning was included). Compare my exposition of Luke xxiii. 43.

[2] As the Sept. in Genesis has ξύλον.

perience comes, they will most abundantly reveal their meaning. We have only one more remark to make, that the promise in every Epistle is chosen with appropriate reference to the condition and conflict of the church addressed: so here the Paradisaical fruit of the tree of life is opposed to the forbidden fruits of fleshly lust with which the Nicolaitanes were swollen. That in these epistles the clearest, most penetrating words of ordinary preaching and teaching are bound up with the most mysterious enigmas, sinking deep into the treasures of Divine revelation from the beginning, is the necessary result of the royal style which is impressed upon them as coming from the Throne. The Spirit reveals their meaning, according to our capacity and our need, in presentiments which cannot be translated into plain exposition, and are not the prerogative of every man.

AND UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA WRITE: THESE THINGS SAITH THE FIRST AND THE LAST, WHICH WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE.[1]

This is the *briefest* among the Epistles, as that to Thyatira is the longest. So, Smyrna receives no blame, Philadelphia alone standing with her in this. To the persecuted martyr-church, suffering unto death, it is enough to say—Be thou faithful! For, if for their purification after falling from the first love tribulation and shame came upon them, this of itself was punishment enough, and the Lord has nothing but consolation to give. Smyrna is chosen as the type of such a condition of the Church: her name (*myrrh*) speaking of the bitterness of suffering, but also of balsam and costly incense, yea, of the anointing and adorning of the bride, according to the Song of Solomon (ch. iii. 6, v. 5). Smyrna was in St John's time an important place, though not equal to Ephesus; she is the only one of the seven which remains to this day, more flourishing and larger than in the time of the Apocalypse: hence there is no removal of the candlestick prefigured in her. She has four Christian churches; since 1759 has had the labours of evangelical missionaries, and is now a central mission-station; as if this new blooming in the midst of the prostrate East would speak of the imperishable crown of victorious life.

[1] The καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμί appears to us quite the same as the καὶ ἔζησεν—in both cases there is a contrast with the actual νεκρός.

To the church thus pointed to suffering and death the Lord exhibits himself as the Conqueror who pressed through death into life. The words which first accompanied the "Fear not!" to the Seer are here most fitly reproduced; the former part of the sublime title is unchanged—The First and the Last (finally recurring in this book, ch. xxi. 6, xxii. 13); the second part, which speaks of dying and living, is condensed with heightened majesty into fewer words. He who in His Divinity was the First before the foundation of the world, and who as also the Last will remain the same with and after the last, will maintain the victory through His hand and power for His people. He who in His humanity, assumed for all eternity, was for one short space dead, and now liveth again as the God-man, the first who lived again from death for all—He may well require fidelity unto death in order to the promised crown of life. Some would here distinguish, and say that in ch. i. 17, 18 He calls Himself the Living *in spite* of death, while here He liveth again *after* death. But this is artificial; it scarcely harmonises with the original; and somewhat disturbs the strong emphasis of the pregnant reality—the having been dead of the Living One! He *was dead:* this retains indeed its continuous truth, as we continually celebrate it in the Sacrament, and is the theme of the new song to the Lamb that was slain; but, at the same time, we cannot too confidently and too thankfully mingle with our Passion-thoughts the great truth that the *Living* was dead and is *alive again.* An effeminate and sentimental Moravian dealing with the suffering and dying Lord would have been very distasteful to the Apostles and the early Church; the New Testament Scriptures give it neither approbation nor nourishment.

I KNOW THY WORKS, AND TRIBULATION, AND POVERTY (BUT THOU ART RICH); AND I KNOW THE BLASPHEMY OF THEM WHICH SAY THEY ARE JEWS, AND ARE NOT, BUT ARE THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN.

This recurring testimony *I know!* is so beautifully expounded by Bengel that we must here at least quote his words. "We go from one hour to another, from one day and year to another, and what is once fairly past in our doing, and omitting, and suffering, is scarcely regarded by us any more: it is like water that has flowed away. But into the omniscience

of Christ all things are taken up!" Yes, indeed, the God-man related to us as the First and the Last preserves in *His* thought the works which are forgotten by us, works whether of first love or of unfaithfulness; He knows beforehand our future sufferings as well as our past, and makes concerning all things His gracious appeal to our souls. In this second Epistle there is a strengthening of the expression (which, omitted in the third, continues through the rest)—THY *works*, "thy," that is, being put first with specific emphasis. The criticism of Tischendorf, so rigidly tied to the manuscripts, maintains that "the words" are an interpolation here and at ver. 13, in order to make all the Epistles uniform. Were this so, there would be indeed a very significant connection with the preceding words:—I, who was dead, know well by My own experience thy *tribulation!* Now, as it respects ver. 13, our internal criticism cannot dispense with the knowledge of *the works* coming first (for the mere "where thou dwellest" is not a sufficiently emphatic object of the knowledge; nor is it a sharp enough antithesis to the *But* of ver. 14); and when we find in the uncontested text of ver. 19, "I know thy works" standing before four other words ending with "works" again, we cannot but conclude that our Lord's purpose was to express *this* seven times consecutively with unchanged emphasis. But the word must be understood after the analogy of Scriptural language, and not as we might speak in an isolated manner of "works." Smyrna presented her *works* to the Lord in *sufferings:*—that is here the pregnant meaning. If her angel might say in tribulation and poverty—"Fain would I also perform good works, but, alas, cannot," the Lord testifies on the contrary—"Thou art rich in works of patience, which are indeed the severest and the best." *Poverty* must here be understood of external need; and we have record elsewhere of the poor state of the Christians generally in Smyrna. Moreover, the richer among them took joyfully the spoiling of their goods in the persecution (Heb. x. 34)—and the Lord's assurance meets them in love, But thou art rich! For the better and enduring substance in heaven, which the poor and the plundered already possessed, maketh the poor rich: so we read 2 Cor. v. 10, Jas. ii. 5; and the Lord Himself opposes to the heaping up of treasures the being rich towards God. But, if we ask further whether

Smyrna was joyfully conscious of these riches, the answer must, we think, be in the negative; and this gives occasion to remark, that the poverty must be meant, at the same time, of spiritual tribulation, oppression, and abasement. Those persecuted unto death have not been hasty—with all their faith in the midst of the fires—with the triumphant note, "But we are the heirs of the kingdom, the elect of God!" So far Smyrna exhibits to us the opposite counterpart of Laodicea. "Thou sayest, *I am rich!* and knowest not how poor thou art!"—has an evil sound. But "I know thy poverty, in which thou art rich"—is precious in the Lord's lips for them and for us.

Tribulation and poverty are followed by *shame;* but that shame is an honour. For the adversaries *blaspheme* in a twofold manner: they scorn the Lord Himself in His people; and they wickedly assume to be His true people themselves. The presuming *Jews* are introduced again, ch. iii. 9, in Philadelphia, and there, more evidently than here, in the far-reaching meaning of the symbolical word. In the first history they were actually Jews who generally appear as the main authors of persecution (1 Thess. ii. 15, 16); Eusebius, when he relates the martyrdom of Polycarp and other Christians, tells us that they were so in Smyrna itself. That these Jews were rather Satan's *children* and instruments, the Lord Himself once told them, John viii. 44; here they are called the congregation or church, the *synagogue* of Satan—instead of the lost, and now blasphemously self-asserted, title of "the congregation of the Lord," which they had in the Old Testament (comp. Ps. xxvi. 4, xxii. 17). Not without design is the word "synagogue" chosen, in order to meet the *Judaizing*, still so called, of all futurity.[1] But the words point still further, and are not less on that account spoken in prophetic type. It is no more than a useless contention of the expositors, whether they were properly or not properly Jews: the former holds good of the history itself, but as a figure the latter. Christianity alone was from that time the essential fulfilment, the consummate truth

[1] In the O. T. we have ἐκκλησία for עֲדַת יְהוָה or קְהַל יְהוָה (in Neh. xiii. 1 קְהַל הָאֱלֹהִים, and Ex. xii. 3 קְהַל יִשְׂרָאֵל) especially in Chron., Ezra, Nehemiah (as earlier in Deut. xxiii. 1–3, xxx. 1–10; 1 Kings viii. 14, 22). On the other hand, in such most ancient passages as Ex. xii. 3, Numb. xvi. 3, xx. 4, xxvii. 17, the N. T. συναγωγή.

of Judaism; the abiding perversion of which blasphemously still terms the Way, to which the Law and the Prophets pointed, heresy and a sect (Acts xxiv. 14). The Jew in his inner reality, in which the prophetic significance of the name *Judah* (Gen. xlix. 8, xxix. 35) first finds its full propriety, whose *praise* is not of men, but of *God*—the same Apostle tells us in the Epistle to the Romans who *he* is (ch. ii. 28, 29). Thus, so far as Smyrna furnishes the type of a condition and a period of the Church in which the Lord's people, in poverty and lowliness, without power and authority in this world, without the help of a fleshly arm, are given up to the suffering of shame and persecution even unto death—the persecuting false church must be intended by the false Judaism, as far as regards the later period of that position and character. For the Smyrna-period, although it is clearly stamped as a time immediately after the Apostolical, yet both stretches backwards into this latter, and simultaneously goes onwards into later periods. This is the only exposition which will satisfy the whole case.

FEAR NONE OF THOSE THINGS WHICH THOU SHALT SUFFER: BEHOLD, THE DEVIL SHALL CAST SOME OF YOU INTO PRISON, THAT YE MAY BE TRIED; AND YE SHALL HAVE TRIBULATION TEN DAYS: BE THOU FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH, AND I WILL GIVE THEE A CROWN OF LIFE. Smyrna, the church of the martyrs, receives enough in that one word—*Fear not!* be faithful! because He who utters it had overcome death as the Forerunner, and brought eternal life to light. Even the historical Smyrna shines in history with the glory of her crowned martyrs, among whom Polycarp is pre-eminent, the pupil of St John, who was executed A.D. 167. But to regard Polycarp as himself the "angel" is an error; for he had scarcely at this early period any prominence in the church, and certainly could not have held that which was afterwards called the office of Bishop. Our translation—thou *shalt* suffer, the devil *shall* cast into prison—is still stronger in the original: It is appointed, it must be so. That which the Divine counsel, here announced beforehand, will wisely permit, is not to be feared, for it will issue not in destruction but in victory: therefore the first strong words—Fear *none* of those things! It is indeed the devil, the wicked enemy and persecutor in his instruments, who opposes the

people of God; but there is already a consolation in this, that they have him for an enemy who assaulted their Lord and Forerunner, who was judged by Him on behalf of His people, and who can move no further than is permitted to him. *Satan* and *Devil*, the two names of the evil one, according to his spirit and his act: "Satan" signifies enemy and opposer in principle, according to the Jewish phrase, and hence it is used first with reference to the Jews; "devil," in Greek phrase, indicates his *blasphemy*, persecution, accusation, and stands here in connection with the work which he wrought by the Gentiles at the instigation of the Jews. He will not cast all together into prison, but many *from among you:*—We have already observed how this shows that the angel of the church was not alone addressed by the epistle; and further remark here, that, on the other hand, a continuous address to the church, as such, would not have been in harmony with the heart-penetrating style of these Epistles, and consequently that every church was with profound propriety viewed as exhibited in one person. Further, the suffering and the test affect the whole church, if some of her members are imprisoned and slain. That ye may be *tried*, tested, and approved: this is less the devil's design, that they may be ashamed in the test (Luke xxii. 31)—than the design of God's permission and appointment, who will crown those who are approved (1 Pet. iv. 12).[1] To the previous tribulation, already mentioned in ver. 9, there is to be added a tribulation of imprisonment; but this will have its short and measured period, and its happy issue. *Ten days*—this we must not in the ordinary manner take as a round number for a brief space; all these well-adjusted words have something below the surface. Whether any portion of the church in Smyrna suffered ten actual days of imprisonment, can neither be proved nor contradicted; but a ten days' tribulation seems to us too slight for the express prediction, accompanied by the earnest preface—Fear none of these things! To endure ten days', and more than ten days', imprisonment, was at that time a very frequent calamity of the Christians. Thus we are constrained, in this strikingly significant term for Smyrna, as often afterwards in this book of prophecy, to observe a prophetic meaning underlying the number. And it is obvious enough to think of the

[1] Thus the ἵνα πειρασθῆτε gives the ground of the μέλλεις and μέλλει.

ten great persecutions which have been reckoned, from the earliest time downwards, as taking place between Nero and Dioclesian, whose most severe persecution, again, lasted ten years;—and this would give us incidental evidence that the book was written under Nero. Yet, whatever may be the fact with regard to these uncertain historical circumstances, the general meaning of this word will assure us that all times of tribulation are measured before the Lord, and that they will be cut short for salvation (Matt. xxiv. 22).

Whether this deliverance from imprisonment, from the tribulation of the ten days, should issue in life or death, was not to be matter of anxiety to them; their duty was to fear nothing and be faithful! "In the words, Be faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life! there is so gracious and sparing a fore-announcement of *death*, that death is not seen; being in the one clause covered by the fidelity, and in the other by the crown" (Rieger). It may indeed be said that death is included in this "*unto*;" but in death itself fidelity is no more wanted, and such a death demonstrates itself to be death no more. Thus it is *unto*, altogether as in Matt. xxiv. 13, x. 22, unto the end. Smyrna receives the announcement of the *coming* of the Lord, which is wanting in none of the Epistles, only in this gracious form with reference to every individual, to every one of whom in death the Lord comes with the crown of life (compare to Thyatira, ver 25, "until I come," connected with the threatening of ver. 23, "I will *give* to every one of you according to your works"); Laodicea, on the contrary, receives it in the strongest and sharpest form of the expression—"I will *spue thee* out!" which is then again softened by the gentler invitation—"I stand at the door and knock!" Further, it is only for Smyrna, the church which is to be greatly comforted, that the promise to the overcomer begins at once with the *universal* anticipating *crown*.[1] This is, indeed, in a specific sense the victor-crown of the witnesses unto blood, of which the very name of the *first* martyr of Christ (*Stephanus* means wreath or crown) was, as it were, a prophecy; but this expression, well-known among the Christian congregations (1 Cor. ix. 25, pointing to the figure before; 1 Pet. v. 4, the unfading crown of glory;

[1] It is something different when the *white garments* are appropriated to only a few, in the Epistle to Sardis, ch. iii. 4.

James i. 12, as here, the crown of *life*), embraces, at the same time, generally, the reward of *all* approved conquerors, as St Paul speaks in 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8 with due humility of this crown of *righteousness:* the righteous Judge will give it not to me alone, but to all who love His appearing. A crown of *life* He gives immediately after *death* to those who die saved, to those who are confirmed in victory; but only as the pledge of that crown of honour or *glory* in consummate eternal life which He will give in the day of His appearing, according to both St Peter and St Paul.

HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES: HE THAT OVERCOMETH SHALL NOT BE HURT OF THE SECOND DEATH. What "ear" instead of "ears" means we have already shown; but take occasion now to oppose Bengel's erroneous notion: "What is said loudly is heard with both ears; what is spoken into the ear is secret." This is to us unsatisfactory; for, notwithstanding the mysteries which are intermixed, the Spirit cries aloud in these Epistles to the churches with the clearest, most awakening, and heart-searching words; words which have been popularly applied, and universally preached about, in every age of the Church. To "have an *ear*" for what the Spirit saith is rather an intensification than a weakening of the saying; since it requires the same spiritual "hearing" for the understanding and acceptance of these exhortations, threatenings, and promises, which those parables of our Lord required, for which the Lord demanded hearing ears.

The concluding promise for Smyrna not only is, like the whole letter, of the shortest, but its lowered and *negative* form seems scarcely in harmony with the gracious, unmingled commendation. When, however, we look at it more carefully, the negation will be seen to be most positive and full, like the sublime words before the resurrection of Lazarus—He that liveth and believeth in Me shall *never die!* Assuredly, for this martyr-church this was the undertone of the words—Though the *first death* may have hurt him, yet he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second. But must we not all die, must we not all press into life by overcoming death? *This*, therefore, is no especial bitterness for Smyrna; the Lord rather means the same comforting and stimulating word which He once

spoke upon earth: Fear not them who can kill the body, and *afterwards have no more* that they can do! Luke xii. 4. That is, if in ver. 5 of that chapter the essential enemy who is behind men—that is, Satan himself—is meant, who hath power and authority to cast into his own hell, that worse imprisonment, and therefore was to be feared; so here for the strong encouragement of those who are faithful and overcome it is intimated—This Satan shall have nothing more that he can do against you! The *second death* is a name of eternal damnation which occurs among the Chaldee translators and the Rabbins;[1] but throughout the Scripture *only* in the Apocalypse. But it so clearly shuts out any such prospect of a future restoration, as has been found in this "hard mystery," that we are constrained to leave it in all its horror, and dare not seek for any light beyond it. This glance forward to the terrific end of the second death is the antithesis of the *paradise* of the promise to Ephesus; but it is opened only for the gracious excitement and invigoration of those to whom it is said—To them that overcometh *no* harm shall happen from him; he shall have no more that he can do![2] Whether here already for the martyrs the first resurrection is indicated, as it comes forward prominently in ch. xx. 6, we much doubt, since there, as here, *pre-eminence* cannot be intimated in that which will hold good of all the saved—The second death (vers. 14, 15 in ch. xx.) hath no power over them. But this has more significance, when we compare the other, final passage, ch. xxi. 8, where, in contrast with this fidelity and its reward, the *fearful*, that is, those who hold not out in the conflict, are threatened with the second death.

AND TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS WRITE: THESE THINGS SAITH HE WHICH HATH THE SHARP SWORD WITH TWO EDGES.

Of this then-existing church we know nothing in particular, and are therefore commended to a consideration of the character assigned to it, and of its prophetic significance. *Perga-*

[1] Deut. xxxiii. 6. Let not Reuben die; Chald. וּמוֹתָא־תִנְיָנָא לָא־יְמוּת—Raschi: וְאַל יָמוּת לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. Similarly, Isa. xxii. 14, the Chaldee brings in the same מותא תנינא—and Raschi says upon it לעולם הבא. Kimchi cites still more plainly מיתת נפש בעולם הבא.

[2] Οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῇ, as in Luke x. 19, οὐδὲν ὑμᾶς οὐ μὴ ἀδικήσῃ.

mos, a not insignificant city in Illyria, formerly the metropolis of a kingdom so called, contains in its name a hint which, more significantly than in most of the others, corresponds with the contents of the Epistle. *Castle* or *tower*—indicates the period and character of the Church which exhibits her as possessing earthly power; but is a time of temptation and danger to the true kernel of the Church, so that there springs up the indolence which does not resist the entrance of impure morals, and the false doctrine on which they are based. Why the Lord here in particular represents Himself as possessing the sharp two-edged sword (ch. i. 16), is easily seen, as afterwards explained in ver. 16; and even with specific reference to the history of Balaam, from whom the typical designation, vers. 14, 15, of him that defiled and seduced the Church was derived. Thus it is against this intermixture, with the spirit of apostasy creeping in, that the Lord draws his cutting, judging, and punishing sword; in which it is obvious further to understand—"Hadst thou in My name rightly used My sword, the sword of the Spirit, the judgment of My sword would not have been summoned against thee!" Taking a general view of the Epistle at the outset, its fundamental traits come out with great distinctness; that is, if we refrain from drawing those specific parallels with church history of later times which have led so many expositors astray. The seat or *throne* even of the same Satan from whom the persecution came to Smyrna, is here set up: the God-opposing power of this world is predominant; and, as we shall, alas, see, has entered into an alliance with the Church. The congregation of the faithful has no longer martyrdom before it; but is only reminded thereof, as of something past. Then formerly there had been no denial; there were to the last faithful witnesses unto death. But now the stumblingblock of fellowship with idolatry and whoredom, in deference to worldly power, is not cast out, but rather tolerated even unto open doctrine. All this suits generally the character which the Church assumed after the persecution ended with Constantine; and especially the Eastern Christianity with its corrupted imperial court under a Christian title, the influence of which was to bind the Church under a bondage of corruption and inertness. Whether, moreover, as many would have it, the period of Pergamos stretches only to

Charlemagne, or further on into the developed Papacy, is hard to say; *we* hold that these periods generally pass one into another, as it respects both the mind of the Spirit and the corresponding history, and that they should not be limited to any distinct epochs.

I KNOW THY WORKS, AND WHERE THOU DWELLEST, EVEN WHERE SATAN'S SEAT IS; AND THOU HOLDEST FAST MY NAME, AND HAST NOT DENIED MY FAITH, EVEN IN THOSE DAYS WHEREIN ANTIPAS WAS MY FAITHFUL MARTYR, WHO WAS SLAIN AMONG YOU WHERE SATAN DWELLETH. We have already given our judgment that here also the uniform commencement, I know thy works! is genuine, as a general introductory testimony. While the Lord must blame the evil works of Pergamos, especially her laxity in controversy with error, and even her positive defilement with that which was indolently permitted, He nevertheless begins most graciously, as in the case of Ephesus, with calling to remembrance the good and honourable Past, which had still its value in His eyes. Still more, He Himself finds a gentle apology for them in their perilous, strongly-tempted position—"I know this also, how hard is thy situation and trial!" How graciously encouraging to His people in similar circumstances always, to hear Him saying, "I know *where thou dwellest!*" Not as if this was meant as a justification of their evil conduct, because they were under persecution and oppression; but condemnation falls less heavily upon the stranger sojourning in Mesech and the tents of Kedar (Ps. cxx. 5), than upon him who dwells among the people of God, in God's own house, amidst blessings and peace. We must here once for all remember that these Epistles are not directed to the great mass of nominal Christians, which is ever increasing as ages roll along, or to the so-called churches; but only to the faithful among the many, the *society* which actually more or less holds to and depends upon the Lord. This becomes an important consideration in the third Epistle, and retains that importance throughout all the remainder. Hence it will appear what *Satan's seat* means in its prophetical sense. First, indeed, as it regards the then Pergamos, which furnished the basis of the symbol, it may have been a public heathen power, through which Pergamos attained, in its degree, to the eminence of a metropolis of heathenism.

The learned refer to the then celebrated temple of *Æsculapius*, the "healer and saviour"—and to the symbol of the *serpent*,[1] as still connected with the physician's art. Ebrard, on the other hand, thinks that this would not have made Pergamos worse than Diana's temple in Ephesus (Acts xix. 27); and prefers finding Satan's throne in the Court of Judicature for the Roman province of Asia, which, according to Pliny, was established there. However that may be—and we can feel no certainty about it—the *prophetic* meaning, which takes that only as its point of connection, plainly refers, as it respects the period of the Church designated by Pergamos, to a *no longer public* heathen power, but a throne of Satan having a Christian semblance and pretension. For thus much we regard as certain, that the epistles in some sense proceed onwards chronologically. Consequently, if first to Ephesus false apostles were mentioned, and then to Smyrna false Jews, that is (as we saw) false Christians, a *synagogue* of Satan, so now, according to the undertone of meaning, in the still increasing development of corruption, the *throne* of Satan must mean something in Christendom, and only something present *in* it. We have already, in our general summary, given to be understood whither that points: it is the *worldly authority* of the external church, politically victorious and predominant, judging spiritual matters in worldly wise, which—although, according to ch. xiii. 2, the throne of the dragon is to be long afterwards first established—the Lord beholds from heaven as being, in its evil depth of reality, the dominion of the prince of this world. Compare the profound saying, Ps. xciv. 20: Wilt thou then have fellowship with the seat of shame (throne of corruption), which establisheth mischief as law (or against the commandment)?

Intelligent readers will understand this; and will discern the mischief which, in its manifold forms as state-church and church-state, clung to the system of salvation and co-existed with it. The community dwelling in this condition has praise enough first accorded: Thou holdest yet fast *My* name (comp. ch.

[1] To refer this to *Satan* is petty, and groundless according to the double meaning of this symbol, good and bad, which had existed in all times. The title Ἀσκληπιὸς σωτὴρ seems more remarkable, as the heathenish counter-power; and an ancient writer actually calls the city κατεῖδωλον ὑπερ τὴν Ἀσίαν πᾶσαν.

iii. 8), with all that it contains, and hast not denied My faith. The not denying is here already counted worthy of commendation. "My faith," that is, faith in Me—but not in the sense of any doctrine of faith or dogmatics, as if (according to many expositors) the Lord would praise the doctrinal elaborations and contests of a corresponding period, especially those of the Oriental Church; while His eyes are looking everywhere for a very different *faith* (Jer. v. 1–3). But the genuine and sound faith which He means, as the source of all works valid in His sight, is one with *fidelity;* thus Antipas is presently termed the *faithful* witness, and Smyrna was before bidden to be *faithful.*[1] Was *Antipas* a historical person of this name in Pergamos? The Hischberger Bible says correctly, that "no trace has remained of him in history;" for that which is found (in the Menologies) concerning one of that name who suffered martyrdom under Domitian, is without trustworthiness, probably being an invention founded upon this passage, and further embellished. The grave pointed out there is certainly one of these deceptions. It is possible, however, that there was an "Antipas" who was slain in Pergamos for the Lord's name sake; and the mention of him would be only an affecting condescending example for *all* His witnesses, whom He knows and remembers! But still it would be the only historical name in all the Epistles—since the Nicolaitanes and Jezebel are not such—and that would appear an improbability. Probably, therefore, it is only a typical name, intended to signify generally the individual witnesses unto death (for the expression "witness" has already here the specific meaning of "martyr," comp. Acts xxii. 20). Holding this firmly,[2] we find the *meaning* of the name (if it was originally an abbreviation of Antipater, that does not hinder the prophetic use of the changed form!) very significant—*Against-all,* one who stood out against the multitude as an individual faithful confessor. Such an Antipas, as we understand it, has more than once been slain among you, *where Satan dwelleth!* The praise which began now returns: "I know and remember where thou must dwell, thou oppressed and tempted flock; and that where Satan dwells there is little room for thee."

"In truth, thy position is still most difficult, and thou comest

[1] In Greek, πίστις and πιστός are from one and the same root.

[2] Without needing to resort to Hengstenberg's further subtilities.

not unhurt from the danger." For Pergamos was not—and this is *not* to her praise—*any longer* persecuted like Smyrna. The whole of ver. 13 exhibits the past, before the *But* follows, as to Ephesus in vers. 2, 3. "*In the days* of Antipas thou didst not deny—but now I must rebuke thee, that thou hast reconciled thyself too easily with Satan's throne, that thou hast made perilous compromise with the impure element of worldly power in the church, though thou hast not utterly fallen. BUT I HAVE A FEW THINGS AGAINST THEE, BECAUSE THOU HAST THERE THEM THAT HOLD THE DOCTRINE OF BALAAM, WHO TAUGHT BALAK TO CAST A STUMBLINGBLOCK BEFORE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, TO EAT THINGS SACRIFICED UNTO IDOLS, AND TO COMMIT FORNICATION. SO HAST THOU ALSO THEM THAT HOLD THE DOCTRINE OF THE NICOLAITANES." Zinzendorf, in his translation of the New Testament, translates as if it were, "a few things, *for example*, the doctrine of Balaam." But *what* the Lord has to say against His churches, He ever speaks plainly and faithfully out—not merely giving examples of His meaning. The *little*[1] seems at first difficult; but the word is used, on the one hand, to mitigate the blame—*only this one thing;* and, on the other, with warning severity to say—Take good heed! Let this soon cease! for a *little* leaven leaveneth the whole lump!

While the omniscient Guardian and Warner of His Church shows the seer in Patmos the future under the figures of the present, He has also, after the prophetical manner (because the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy, ch. xix. 10), the past from the beginning before His all-embracing glance. Beginning with the Epistle to Ephesus, He looked back to the Fall and paradise; and with this was connected, in the Epistle to Smyrna, perseverance in the view of *death*, the first and the second. Now the backward reference of the type proceeds into the history of *Israel;* and, first of all, to the time of Moses, when the chosen and redeemed people was subjected to *temptation* in the wilderness. According to the same fundamental law of the Divine guidance, concurring with human freedom, the Lord's New Testament people proceed in the same way; so fully corresponding, on the whole and at large, that a parallel of the Old Testament times and history with those of the New

[1] Ὀλίγα is neutral for ὀλίγον τι.

in their entire development, offers us much most important instruction.[1] Manifold in their ample application are the types; to teach us this the Lord makes prominent here a person and a history which St Peter (ch. ii. 15), and St Jude after him (ver. 11), have used in the same way. *Balaam* was the ambiguous prophet external to Israel, from the beginning unfaithfully wavering between obedience to God's revelation, and the lust for the rewards of unrighteousness. He was warned, and yet went *his own* way; but must, against His will, bless Israel. But this vexed him all the more; and we read in Numb. xxv. 1, 2, xxxi. 16 of his cunning and revengeful counsel to Balak,

[1] As suggestive hints for the reflection of such as will pursue them, we add what follows. *Seven* great periods, or rather *six*, passing over into a seventh, may be disclosed as corresponding, partly by *contrast*, and partly as parallel. The primitive world under Divine long-suffering, the continuous Fall down to the first judgment of the world—primitive Christendom under Divine power of grace, continuous downfall of heathenism down to the first judgment upon it. (Noah—Constantine.) The preparation of God's people in the dark period of the other peoples;—the preparation of the *European peoples—Christendom* in the unresting time of the wanderings of races. (Moses—Charlemagne.) The kingdom of Israel as the appointed type, in which decline and perversion is developed and revealed;—the Romish Church as the tolerated transition, in which we see the same decline. (Nebuchadnezzar—Hildebrand.) The Babylonish period, time of servitude, the time when the empires of heathenism begin;—Papal-worldly period, only a waiting seed (like the two tribes of Israel) is reserved, the separation of the European states begins. (Zerubbabel—Luther.) Persian-Greek period, building of the second Temple, the first bloom of heathen culture ceases;—Protestant political age, founding of the new Church, the first Reformation of national life has the same fate. (Alexander—Napoleon.) Greek-Roman time, advancing power of the world, Israel recedes before the second bloom of heathenism, general decline, and most proper *time of expectation*;—missionary period and period of development, advancing revelation of the true Church, the second Reformation in which Christians become *predominant*, finally restoration (even for Israel after the flesh) and the most proper *time of fulfilment*. Lastly, as according to the ancient history the appearance of the Lord brings its end (instead of judgment) to these six days, so similarly, at the end of the new period, there will be the millennial kingdom, the final appearance; and with it, at the same time, the judgment. How the *churches* of these Epistles correspond to these periods as indicated by them, must be left to the individual pondering of the reader; in this internal relation there are other points which must be brought into view; but Thyatira may refer to the Papal, Sardis to the Protestant period, while Philadelphia and Laodicea go in concurrently to the coming of the Lord.

in order to ruin Israel by seduction, that he should set a stumblingblock in the way of the people of God,—that is, literally, throw an offence in their way, to be to them a pitfall or a snare. With this the Lord now compares the people of the church in Pergamos, who, favouring *the Balaam* of their time (for that is the right reading), that is, for the sake of the worldly power before mentioned as the throne of Satan, seduce the spiritual Israel to infidelity, yea, construct a formal theory and *doctrine* to which they *hold*—instead, as was said before, of holding to the name of the Lord. The point of comparison is first exhibited, even in external reality; while yet open heathenism still predominated, the eating of *things sacrificed to idols* and *fornication* were the sins of those who renounced not the false and seducing fellowship with him; and this was already foreseen in Acts xv. 29, though not till 1 Cor. x. by St Paul most earnestly denounced. The eating at the table of devils was at the same time a spiritual fornication and idolatry. Both the proper and the figurative meaning, but rather the latter, apply to the later time which Pergamos typified, since the teaching and acting after the manner of Balaam, the compromising and impurely self-justifying fellowship with the nominally Christian powers of the world, manifests itself both in actual immorality and in hypocritical dogmatics touching the seats of Cæsars and Bishops, the establishment of idolatrous images in the place of God's pure worship, and so forth. But we will abstain from the special ecclesiastical interpretation, in order that no one may overlook that which suits his own time!

This, however, is clear and certain to us; ver. 15 does *not* distinguish other so-called *Nicolaitanes* from the *Balaamites* (so to term them); but both are evidently the same. All things tend to this, when carefully considered. SO THOU ALSO HAST —this *so* with this *also* gives us the interpretation of what had been before figuratively expressed: "Alas, thou also, a Christian community, *hast* retained, and dost not cast out, *such people*, *Nicolaitanes*, as I have already, for the first church, plainly translated their name!" "Who hold to the doctrine"—the same formula is repeated! Probably the definite article in "doctrine of *the* Nicolaitanes" is not genuine; in the original it would be the mere translation of "Balaam;" such Balaam-doctrine, Nicolaitan, seductively overcoming the people. In

ver. 6 only the *works* were mentioned; but now there has a *doctrine* crept in, within the church which tolerated those works! The theory has never been long wanting, in the world and even in the Church, when the practice has gone before. Finally (instead of the "which I hate," as in ver. 6), stands, according to the more correct reading, once more "in like manner."[1] The "so" at first, and "in like manner" at last, combine very strongly to assure us that a doctrine of Nicolaitanes is meant which perfectly corresponds to the doctrine of Balaam.

REPENT THEREFORE. IF NOT, I WILL COME UNTO THEE QUICKLY, AND WILL FIGHT AGAINST THEM WITH THE SWORD OF MY MOUTH. On the perfect Balaamites or Nicolaitanes repentance is no longer enjoined, but judgment is denounced; but those who were entangled with them are (with the same "*now*" as in ver. 5) exhorted to conversion in penitent change of mind. So far the denunciation of the fighting *against them* applies to the whole church—so far, that is, as they were in and among the church; but it is something different from saying, "I will fight against *thee*." We must understand: "If thou dost not perform thy duty, and cast them out from thee, I will undertake it Myself." The sword of *the mouth* is spoken of, which may, indeed, include a spiritual judging and restoration of sinners through the word; yet we see plainly in ch. xix. 15, 21, that condemning sentence of wrath may proceed from the mouth of the Almighty. The language of prophetic symbols is ever comprehensive for manifold interpretation and reference; and it sometimes retains, at the same time, the most specific allusions, as here the threatening *sword* certainly refers back once more to Balaam's history. Because Balaam did not yield to the word of the Lord, which came in his way (Num. xxii. 23, 31)—for his "I will get me back again" was not sincere; the evil desire remained in him, and was at first punished by being permitted—we read afterwards, in Num. xxxi. 8, the express requital, "Balaam also, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword!" We have it in our power, through penitence or the reverse, to decide how gently or severely, whether in wrath or mercy, this sword of His mouth shall judge us.

[1] This ὁμοίως, which many (Grotius and Bengel) carry on to the following word, has been changed into ὃ μισῶ, because of the οὕτως going before.

HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES: TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH WILL I GIVE[1] OF THE HIDDEN MANNA, AND WILL GIVE HIM A WHITE STONE, AND IN THE STONE A NEW NAME WRITTEN, WHICH NO MAN KNOWETH SAVING HE THAT RECEIVETH IT. The oppression and imprisonment in Egypt—the persecutions and plagues, which in the New Testament fell not upon Egypt, but upon Israel—are now passed to Pergamos; but to her the way through the wilderness is appointed as a time of probationary trial. As the name of Balaam was taken from this period, so also are the figurative expressions of promise. The antitype, indeed, often corresponds with the type in the way of contrast. Israel's *manna*, not yet the true bread from heaven, was not *hidden;* but that which Christ gives to the faithful, as the compensation of the renounced idol-sacrifices and carnal lusts—not properly the same as the fruit of the tree of life, ver. 7, since already before death the foretaste of that is received—is a spiritual nourishment, known only by experience to those who receive it.[2] The *white stone* has been variously interpreted. The ancients used such stones in voting and electing, as the Greek verb shows; and accordingly Luther understood it here of a "good testimony" of absolution—it might be said also, of election. Others have thought of the little tablets, or stone counters, which were given to the conquerors in contests, as the pledge of the prize; and which were also their claim to public support, thus connecting them with the manna already spoken of. We would not, indeed, assert that heathen customs could not be used in Christian symbols, for 1 Cor. ix. 24–27 gives a decisive example to the contrary; on the other hand, it might be regarded as not inappropriate that, in the letter to Pergamos, the Lord should set His own in opposition to worldly and political marks of honour and care. Nevertheless, the name written upon the stone, in connection with the allusion to the time of Moses which pervades all, decides us, in common with many others, to interpret it differently. But not as Herder does, who thinks of the new reckoning of the people, as

[1] The φαγεῖν ἀπό (to eat of), brought forward from ver. 7, we omit.

[2] The Jewish fable concerning the hiding of the ark of the covenant, and its being found in the time of the Messiah, has nothing to do with this; for in 1 Kings viii. 9 we are told that the manna was no longer in it.

it were chosen anew, Num. xxvi.; for that would apply to all the rebuked, and not merely to the faithful. The *white* stone, that is, in the language of the Apocalypse (ch. i. 14, iii. 4, vi. 2, vii. 14), the shining stone, with the name upon it, seems to be most correctly understood of a precious stone,[1] with allusion either to the breastplate, or, still better, to the frontlet, of the high priest, and thus of priestly ornament. The book of Revelation mentions and promises generally much that is *new* (ch. v. 9, xiv. 3, xxi. 1, 2, 5) out of the transcendently fulfilling grace of the New Testament; as the Evangelist of the Old Covenant, Isaiah, delighted to point forward to it from the far distance, ch. xlii. 9, xliii. 19, xlviii. 6. The same prophet, ch. lxii. 2, lxv. 15, lxvi. 22, promised for Jerusalem generally, and all her justified residue of citizens, with all joined unto them by grace (ch. lvi. 5), a *new name* — new, like the new heaven and the new earth, which God in the end would make; and our book brings here the nearer pledge of its fulfilment. To give a new name had been from the time of Abraham and Israel a symbolical and elective act of God, containing in its meaning some new gift or new creation, either in the present reality or in prophecy. The new name for him that overcometh, is, according to its essential significance, one with the name of the new city of God; and this again is one with the new name of the Lord Himself, who buildeth it, and who alone maketh all things new (ch. iii. 12, xxi. 2, xix. 12, comp. Jer. xxiii. 6, xxiii. 16; Ezek. xlviii. 35). This still concealed name, which the Lord's mouth will utter (Is. lxii. 2), as it is termed a sign and seal upon the *foreheads* of the servants of God (Rev. vii. 3, xiv. 1, xxii. 4), corresponds to the golden frontlet of the high priest, with the inscription, "Holiness to the Lord." It is not, like other names, a mark to denote their persons to others, but a promise and fulfilment of that blessed and glorious state and experience concerning which, as concerning the being and glory of the Lord Himself, it can only be said, that no man knows that name but he that has it—he that has *received* it. Thus high does the promise to those who overcome in Pergamos already reach; as we shall see that throughout the Epistles the promises advance higher and higher, as the counterpoise to the more and more severe conflict, until in ch. iii. 21 the highest that can be

[1] Which ψῆφος may mean.

said is said to Laodicea,—the sitting with the First Overcomer upon His throne being the sublime conclusion.

AND UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA WRITE: THESE THINGS SAITH THE SON OF GOD, WHO HATH HIS EYES LIKE UNTO A FLAME OF FIRE, AND HIS FEET ARE LIKE FINE BRASS. The same who in ch. i. 13 was "like unto the Son of man"—which recurs in the still more indirect and vision-like representation of His coming in ch. xiv. 14—calls Himself, here alone in the entire book, the *Son of God.* (Comp. ch. xix. 13. This only, however, brings into prominence what was presupposed in that other name.) Manifestly, it is used not only to exhibit His own despised dignity in opposition to the shameless prophetess Jezebel, ver. 20, but at the same time to oppose to the lyingly so-called "depths of God," ver. 24 (only thus to be explained), His own perfect interior knowledge of those Divine deep things (Matt. xi. 27). The eyes of flame exhibit in connection with this His omniscience as it regards the secrets of men (Rom. ii. 16), the Searcher of hearts who is prominent afterwards in ver. 23. That, further, precisely *here* the feet of fine brass indicate a coming to judgment, can scarcely be rejected, as we remarked upon the appearance at the beginning; but in that former passage this is not the *only* interpretation, and in this one it is not to be pressed too far. Treading down all that opposes, and victoriously pressing onwards—so far all is right; but it is questionable whether "*stamping down* and *burning* all that thwarts Him,"[1] and that with allusion to Jezebel's fate, 2 Kings ix. 33.[2] The casting into a bed afterwards, ver. 22, is not a treading down; nor is even the *smiting to death*, ver. 23. We think that in ch. i. 14, 15, previously, the dark-glowing brightness of the feet was no more designed to indicate *burning* than the glance of the eyes; we understand generally the resplendent footsteps of His advancing and irresistible *might:* compare for Thyatira afterwards, ver. 26. That the semblance of burning is mentioned here, may be regarded as leaving in its sole prominence the meaning of victorious power, without any accessory notion of trampling or consuming by fire. These symbols must neither be exaggerated nor confused: the treader of the winepress, ch.

[1] As we read in v. Gerlach.

[2] As Herder, contrary to his wont, tastelessly interpreted it.

xix. 15, comes not with glowing, burning feet; hence, while in ver. 12 of that chapter the eyes, and in ver. 15 the sword, are mentioned again, the feet of the previous appearance are not introduced.

The prophetic significance of the Church of *Thyatira*, to which the longest Epistle was sent, appears the most obscure of all, as it stands in the midst of the seven; as obscure as the middle age of ecclesiastical history to our dim eyes, when we attempt to trace the Lord's ways and dealings with His never-failing Church. Certainly there existed at that time in the Lydian Thyatira, whence the first-fruits of the mission in Europe came, Acts xvi. 14, a Christian church,[1] which, under the pressure of fearful apostasy, nevertheless had yet its faithful members, vers. 24, 25. And, with equal certainty, the stamp upon Thyatira exhibits to us a *progression of corruption* even beyond Pergamos, inasmuch as a ruling Jezebel is much more than a Balaam giving evil counsel. But the detail will follow in the exposition.

I KNOW THY WORKS, AND CHARITY, AND FAITH, AND THY SERVICE, AND THY PATIENCE; AND THY LAST WORKS MORE THAN THE FIRST. The original cannot be exactly translated; for it gives the pronoun *thy* expressly twice to the works, but only once to all the other four intermediate words together. To the love indeed corresponds the service, as to the faith the patience or continuance; yet the preceding two designations of internal sentiment are more closely connected than the two designations of the outward act.[2] Judging from the plenitude of the words and the priority of the love, which in Ephesus had grown faint, one might at first suppose that Thyatira received the highest praise; but when we look more carefully, that appearance is removed. We see rather that it is only the great grace of the Lord which will at the outset acknowledge as much as is consistent with truth, as much as the eyes of flame piercing through the evil signs may yet discern. That the *works*, here as everywhere mentioned first, recur again at the end, must, when we connect with it the rest of the Epistle, be

[1] According to Epiphanius, many rejected the Apocalypse on account of its historical incorrectness in this particular. Bengel refers to the fact that a reading, which however is not to be approved of, omits ἐκκλησίας.

[2] There is a reading which brings these two more closely together: διακονίαν καὶ ὑπομονήν, without the repeated article.

interpreted as somewhat qualifying and diminishing the whole. Assuredly, Thyatira has works of love to present to the Lord; and where this *love*, here graciously named first, exists, there must be also most certainly *faith:* this inference from without to within appears to be denoted by the succession of the words. That this faith, working by love, by no means denotes that adherence to *dogma*, which in the Lord's sight has no distinctive value and praise, we have already shown upon ver. 13.[1] The faith which the Lord acknowledges is never mere doctrine, mere confession: in the connection and process here, it is no less than, as in ver. 13, the *fidelity* of faith holding fast to Him; although it would not be right on that account to translate "fidelity" simply, for the fundamental idea is always the same as the former. *Service* of love does not merely indicate in the most specific sense benevolence and communication, as is meant in 2 Cor. ix. 12, 13 (more closely translated, "the presentation of this service;" in Greek, *diakonia*); but it means generally what we find in Heb. vi. 10. Thyatira exhibited her perseverance in works of serving and solicitous love, which cannot be presented in their genuineness without genuine faith—hypocritical works the Lord never could praise!—she continues in them so diligently, that the Lord even beholds the last to be greater than the first. This, taken by itself, and thus compared with ver. 6 preceding, would constitute the highest praise of spiritual growth:—but how does this consist with the remaining characteristics of that church, which must however modify its meaning? Is Thyatira on that account better than Ephesus? or, can there be a general and real advancement in the energy of Christian life and work, even while a Jezebel is guiltily allowed place and power? An unprejudiced consideration of the whole context constrains us to adopt an exposition which, at the same time, opens to us the prophetical meaning of the whole. It is obvious that the Lord addresses only the faithful in and among the community of Thyatira. These, partly seduced, partly not seduced, though guilty of an unholy

[1] Ebrard, therefore, is not correct: "Men may be zealous in good works, and even (as opposed to heathenism) in orthodox Christian faith, and *nevertheless* have a Jezebel for queen and prophetess." Nor was this church "worse than any other;" for we find worse in ch. iii. 1, 2, and again iii. 15, 16.

compromise with evil, may be, in relation to the predominant corruption, only a very small flock; but they are nevertheless, and they are called, the Lord's Church! Here we should discern, and learn to imitate, the mild judgment of Him who did not absolutely reject the legal zeal of the Jewish Christians who believed on Him, with all its slow perception of faith, and even mistrustful enmity to His Apostle Paul and the Gentile brethren. If it be said that those walked uprightly according to their best knowledge and ability in grace, we may also say that the Christians in Thyatira, the *saints* in the finished *Catholic* Church (for thither all points in the end!), practise pre-eminently *works of serving love*, as must be evident to all, and in such a manner as to put evangelical churches to shame. Shortly before, and again after the Reformation, we see the last works more and better than the first; faithful strivings after amendment of the head and the members, co-existing with deficient knowledge, and a labour all the more on that account zealous. Many Reformers before the Reformation—those especially who with all their endeavours never broke with Rome, and many earnest and most honourable labourers after the Reformation, who would not become Protestants, have their share in this commendation. But we would not reckon among the last works the testimonies against the Papacy, and make "the Reformation itself the crown of this period;" for that would be a premature anticipation here at the beginning, and in ver. 28 we have an intimation of that end and the *reward* of the genuine and faithful of Thyatira. At first the vehement condemnation of the predominance of the great offence breaks out.

NOTWITHSTANDING I HAVE AGAINST THEE THAT THOU SUFFEREST THAT WOMAN JEZEBEL, WHICH CALLETH HERSELF A PROPHETESS, AND TEACHETH AND SEDUCETH MY SERVANTS TO COMMIT FORNICATION, AND TO EAT THINGS SACRIFICED UNTO IDOLS. Here we must not introduce a reading which Luther received and so translated—a *few things*, or a *little thing!* For, Jezebel's dominion was, as has been observed already, more than Balaam's counsel. Thou *sufferest* her; that is, to do what she will, unhindered and unpunished.[1] With all the diligent service of their benevolent and practical faith, there was yet no practical

[1] The form ἀφεῖς has been defended by Bengel, as from the form ἀφέω. The reading ἐᾷς is obviously an explanatory gloss

and earnest contradiction of godless power and predominant sin: this was a characteristic which we see historically illustrated in the later times of the Church, and which prevented Thyatira from taking a place on a level with apostolical Ephesus with her first love, and enduring Smyrna. A modern expositor makes a strange mistake when he says: "The longing desire for the consummation of the kingdom of God in the present state of things is a sad but affecting aberration of overflowing love." O no! the whore Jezebel in Christendom seduces to open fornication, and the sacrifices of idols: she springs from a very different origin, even as the typical Jezebel was the heathenish daughter of a king. Ebrard has correctly observed that the typical expressions of the Epistles are chosen in historical progression, this being taken from the time of the kingdom of Israel; and, moreover, the miserable period of Ahab and Jezebel is chosen, as opposed to the flourishing (though not *ideal*, as Ebrard says) period of David and Solomon. He perceives also (though inconsistently, after his earlier assertions concerning the Nicolaitanes) that this ruling Jezebel (whose whoredom and witchcraft are great, 2 Kings ix. 22) could not have been an actual historical personage in Thyatira. How could a *woman* have so *taught and seduced*, and such doctrine as is described afterwards in ver. 24? We read, indeed, in Brandt's School Bible: "It was the chief minister's own wife—a wicked hypocrite, who doubtless deceived her own husband;" but we regard it as out of the question, and utterly untenable, that the wife of the bishop had literally in Thyatira seduced the community to debauchery, and that the bishop, whose last works were better than the first, had leniently tolerated it! The reading "*thy* wife," which Luther retains, though it is not in the ordinary text, is undoubtedly correct;[1] but it does not of itself mean the wife of the "angel," because the *Thou* of these Epistles does not apply to the representative personally, but rather to the church which was represented by him. As Ahab formerly sold himself to his wife, to do evil before the Lord (1 Kings xxi. 20, 25, according to the more exact translation; compare Rom. vii. 14), so here the typical expression, referring back to him, runs—Thou lettest *thy wife* rule; that is, thou art a king Ahab, acting as he acted. This *Jezebel*, whom Rieger not unaptly terms "the female antichrist of the Old Testa-

[1] Bengel says, without reason, videtur esse glossa.

ment," did not assume, if we read her history literally, to be a *prophetess* while she was a prophet-murderess; but it is in harmony with the deeper interpretation, that we should regard her as inspired and urged to her deeds by demoniac or Satanic influence. In the wider-reaching meaning of this mystical-prophetical personage, we shall scarcely err if we think of the great whore of ch. xvii. 1, 2, of the spurious and lying church which cherishes an apostate fellowship with the powers of this world, and thereby rules over nations and kings,—the full reality of which must be sought in a later futurity, while its prelude has been seen in the Papacy, but not in that alone. For, why should we think only of Rome, and not also of the "holy synods" of the "orthodox" church which forbids all missions, and encourages the worship of saints and relics? And are there not others that might be included?

The beginning of this abomination was already indicated in Pergamos, ver. 14; but now, when it has become a power which shamefully veils its iniquity by the name of God (as prophetess), *whoredom* comes first with intenser expression. Here, as there, it is used both in the proper and in the figurative sense of the word; for, where the reins are given to the flesh in idolatrous apostasy, the vilest debauchery and uncleanness must be a concomitant. The pretension to splendid sanctity issues often in this miserable opposite, as the results of celibacy, and monkery tóo, have too much shown. But the principal meaning is here spiritual adultery, of which ver. 22 especially speaks.

All this sets more and more plainly before us that interpretation of Thyatira in the history of the Church which we avow as our own, though without contending for it here; and the *name* of this Lydian town might seem expressly chosen, under the direction of Providence, to this end. It signifies etymologically,[1] "zealous in *sacrifices* or *slaughter*," which may be taken both in a good and bad sense; though, after the analogy of Pergamos and Laodicea, we might make the bad sense alone prominent. First, the wicked sacrifices which Jezebel, persecuting and slaughtering the prophets and witnesses of God (and this name is sufficient to establish the point), are surely no acceptable odour before the Lord; and similarly the sacrifice of the Mass,

[1] Certainly from θύος and ἀτειρής, inexhaustible, unwearying; though with considerable change of the form.

with all that it presumes and all its results, is, and must ever be, as the Heidelberg Catechism rightly affirms, an accursed idolatry. To unite with this in one common character and name the good works of pious service, which ver. 19 previously praises, as if they were merely "consecrations" and "offerings," seems to us altogether unworthy of the prophetical typology of the Lords' manner of speaking here. Thus we cannot agree with the generally enlightened v. Meyer, who describes the church of Thyatira as the sacrificer generally, blending the good and the laudable with the superfluous and evil. He refutes himself afterwards, when he shows that the word lying at the root of "Thyatira" was used specifically of the Bacchic orgies and all their frenzy.[1] This, in its mildest interpretation, would lead us to no other than enthusiastic fanaticism and fanatical enthusiasm; but the Lord Himself gives the right name—whorish sacrifices to idols. Thus it is the pseudo-sacrificial church; as Pergamos was the false tower and elevation. As even the faithful in Pergamos receive their name from dwelling there, where this falsely exalted seat of Satan was, so we need not be astonished that similarly Jezebel, with her shameful offerings, must give her name to the church held fast under her power. Although the Lord's justice distinguishes this church from Jezebel herself; and condemns her only for this, that, with much otherwise praiseworthy, she tolerated Jezebel.

AND I GAVE HER SPACE TO REPENT; AND SHE WILL NOT REPENT OF HER FORNICATION. This is the original, and not as in our translation. The limit assigned by forbearance is very distant, as history has shown us; and in a certain sense it is not yet reached, though Sardis has been in existence, and the beginning of Philadelphia has appeared. To Pergamos it was threatened, "I come *quickly*;" but here, on the contrary, there is the prediction of a long delay of judgment.[2] But this patience —the Lord says beforehand—will by the ungodly be perverted to license: she only hardens herself in consequence, and will persistently not repent. Is it not as if this was a prophecy of the notorious consistency of the never retrogressive Papacy, and

[1] Θύειν, primarily equivalent to *raging*, *being inspired*, etc.; the substantive being used in the same meaning, and then *incense*, *offering*.

[2] For, χρόνος is always a relatively long space; hence it is equivalent to *continuance*, or *delay*.

of all established ecclesiastical systems like her in secular corruption? But the punishment will not fail in this lengthened delay; it is already announced in its preludes.

"Behold, I cast her into a bed, and those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her deeds; and her children I will smite with death" (literally, in the death). To Thyatira and Laodicea only, the *exhortation*—which is never altogether wanting—begins in connection with a preliminary *threatening*. Indeed, for Jezebel, supposed to be impenitent, and therefore not exhorted to repentance, the judgment here spoken of holds good: but not only for her, for them also who by their own fault and folly have been perverted with her; although for them it follows more gently—If they repent not. The bed of whoredom shall be turned, as the natural consequences of debauchery abundantly typify, into a *bed* of pains and plagues, into which the Lord as Judge will cast them in His time, so certainly that it is already spoken of as in the present time—*Behold*, I cast them![1] Job xxxiii. 19 and Isa. xxviii. 20 are parallel for the figurative expression. The *Teachers' Bible*, which we have already quoted, says here most strangely: "The seducer was present when all this was publicly read in the church, and may well have been smitten with sickness on hearing it." Whatever calamity may have befallen the historical Thyatira, as a sudden judgment, the chief meaning here refers to a very different fulfilment of the word. Those who *commit adultery* with Jezebel—here manifestly figurative—are by no means one with Jezebel herself, as if this was only the collective name for the guilty. For, as we have said, the provision for their repentance, in order to the turning away of the judgment, distinguishes them from the essential evil power and corruption itself; and, again, these adulterers are to repent of *her* works, that is of Jezebel's, which indeed have become their own. Once more, not altogether the same with themselves are *her children*, begotten of adulterers and the great harlot (so that here, as in Isa. lvii. 3, the *mother* is the stem),—that is, the brood of Jezebel growing up and thriving in successive and progressive corruption. These become naturally worse than their fathers, the first

[1] The needlessly emphatic ἐγώ is spurious; nor is it to be corrected into βαλῶ, either here or ver. 24, although the Epistles do everywhere promise and threaten in the future, and ἀποκτενῶ follows.

adulterers; so that again we find to these, without any "if they repent not," certain death foreannounced.[1] The righteous Judge leaves nothing unpunished; but measures out to each His judgment according to the degree of guilt. In the *killing* we are scarcely to think of the slaughter of the seventy sons of Ahab, 2 Kings x. 7; for, these were not all the sons of the one mother Jezebel (any more than the seventy sons of Gideon, Judg. ix. 5, were the fruit of one marriage), nor were they adulterously begotten to Ahab. A comparison has been more plausibly instituted with the vengeance predicted on children in the Old Testament, such as Ps. cxxxvii. 9; 2 Kings viii. 12; Isa. xiii. 16; Nahum iii. 10; though it is merely the strong expression of "killing" which has occasioned it. The words are plain enough, without any such collation of other passages: the bed and the killing belong to each other; the one illustrates the other, since the couch of pain and tribulation ends with death and destruction, that is, for the children as well as for the mother. As to the fulfilment of all this in the history of the Church, we can only say that the further into the distance the prophecies recede, the more difficult it is to point to the definite fulfilment in facts. We agree generally with v. Meyer, who, without foreclosing whatever else the future may bring, regards this threatening to Thyatira as already *variously* fulfilled in preliminary judgments, both in the Eastern and the Western Church: in wars and divisions, in Mohammedan victories, in afflictions and losses of every kind which have befallen the dominant "church" down to our times. The final bed of plagues, indeed, in which Jezebel will be more closely pressed than she has ever yet been, and have no longer the power to stretch herself out and turn, the future has yet to bring: for Thyatira, alas! still continues; the various characteristics of this midmost form of the Church, as they are developed by time, run together through history more evidently than those of any of the others.

Very aptly, as a hint for *this* interpretation, meets us the additional clause, here alone thus enlarged: AND ALL THE CHURCHES SHALL KNOW THAT I AM HE WHICH SEARCHETH THE REINS AND HEARTS: AND I WILL GIVE UNTO EVERY ONE OF YOU ACCORDING TO YOUR WORKS. Thyatira lay about

[1] Meyer understands actual children, who would be hidden by death from greater evil; but this mixes up too much the literal and the figurative.

the middle of the typical circle of the Seven; what befell in her was known all round. So the approaching, and at last decisive judgment upon the ecclesiastical economy typified by Thyatira, is before the eyes of *all* the others, as it were, after each of the seven forms of the Church. Therefore we have the additional clause concerning the final general judgment, of which this will be a type and awful warning, with the well-known Old Testament formula, which recurs in ch. xx. 12, 13, xxii. 12—*To every man according to his works!* To every man among *you:* here the address is changed, and the view is extended beyond the individual Epistle to include *all* the churches; ver. 24 returning again to the particular *you* for Thyatira. According to ch. xix. 1–6, the hosts and elders in heaven extol the judgments of God, with the first and only "Halleluiah" of the Apocalypse and of the New Testament,[1] that He had condemned the great whore! But in the judgment is revealed the *Searcher of hearts;* and Jesus Christ will reveal Himself as such! In the Old Testament this sublime and penetrating title (also speaking of the reins and hearts, that is, the desires and the thoughts) occurs, of course, only of God: *e.g.*, Ps. vii. 10; Jer. xi. 20, xii. 3; also, in connection with the judgment, and just as here, Jer. xvii. 10; Prov. xxiv. 12. *All the churches* have indeed long known that He whom they call the Lord, this Searcher of hearts and Judge, is one and equal with the Father. They have known it, but have not sufficiently understood and remembered it: therefore the Lord, who had named Himself before, ver. 18, the Son of God, significantly says here: "They shall know that I am He!" Which threatening of judgment once more combines tenderness with its severity: "I will assuredly look at the *heart*, and only according to the heart estimate the deeds."

Of this He gives at the same time a proof, when He graciously returns to the oppressed and burdened of *Thyatira*, who can stand through their fidelity to Him, and to the little centre of believers already praised in ver. 19 as existing even under the Jezebel government. BUT UNTO YOU I SAY, THE REST IN THYATIRA, AS MANY AS HAVE NOT THIS DOCTRINE, AND HAVE NOT KNOWN THE DEPTHS OF SATAN, AS THEY SPEAK: I WILL PUT UPON YOU NONE OTHER BURDEN. The reading and interpretation "unto you and *unto the rest*" is incorrect; for who

[1] Compare the first time in the Old Testament, in Ps. civ. 35.

could be referred to over and above those who were addressed? The *rest* are rather all who stand before the gentle yet severe judgment of the Lord, whom the Searcher of all hearts knows to be His own in Thyatira, and whom therefore He thus terms, as in the case of Sardis also, ch. iii. 2. The protesting minority, hidden for the most part from the eyes of men, was the saved "remnant" according to the election of grace, mighty *in them*, corresponding to the Seven Thousand of the time of Elias (Rom. xi. 2–5). To these belong all, exactly numbered in the Lord's "as many as," who have *not* and do not hold that doctrine of ruin; although even they, as was said before, too generally tolerate it, and there is no zealous prophet Elijah among them. And how was that? Because they have not *known*[1] that which the Lord alone can know as in its depths Satanic. Ebrard unnaturally refers the clause, "as they say," to the Christians of Thyatira themselves, while he condemns the common exposition ("as those who hold the doctrine call it") as unnatural. But, were that the case, we should certainly expect, after the *address* with "but I say *unto you*," and so much other reference to the persons spoken to, that the recognition of their right sentiment would also be introduced by a personal address, "as *ye* rightly term it." Moreover, the entire character of the Church of Thyatira does not prepare us to expect among them any such decisive testimony against Jezebel. Assuredly, these "remaining ones" here, that is, *all, as many as* do not hold this doctrine, are *not* entirely distinguished from that "main bulk of the church which *tolerated* Jezebel's evil doings;"—they are the same, those which were before commended, ver. 19, though certainly the best portion of them. Thus *these* were not they who "boldly condemned these doings as *Satanic*, and opposed Jezebel as *Elijahs*." But we must understand them to be, as a consideration of history will show, those men (the sympathising High Priest calls them *servants of God*, and in ver. 20 *His* servants, embracing the seduced in common), pious Catholics, before and after the Reformation, who nevertheless, like even John Huss, were so blinded by Jezebel, that they entertained no doubt of the Divine institution of the Papacy, but supposed rather that such an institute was necessary for the unity of the Church, for the preservation of apostolical tradition, and for the certain interpretation of Scripture. The

Lord, indeed, plainly declares, that while they are not *seduced* by this doctrine, and *have* it not in its practical consequences, do not teach the essential evil which was connected with it, yet they are at least *deceived* concerning it, since they *do not know* its evil ground, and, in spite of all that obviously might have taught them, *have not discerned* its essential sin. They are those who have not been initiated into the abysmal corruption; and therefore, through this lack of insight, have been preserved and saved. In these pregnant words the emphasis lies upon the "*depths:*" this is the third and final denomination, after the synagogue of Satan in Smyrna, and the seat of Satan in Pergamos; now first is the perfectly perverted anti-Christianity arisen from these depths as a doctrine and a power. The expression connects itself with manifestations of the apostolical age, in which the mystery of iniquity was already beginning in its pre-intimations to work (2 Thes. ii. 7). Those fleshly Gnostics built their adulterous life upon high-flown theories of a so-called *knowledge*, and talked about "the deep things *of God*," which the Spirit had revealed unto them (1 Cor. ii. 10). To us it is by no means unnatural, in the concise phrase which must be understood by the whole connection, that *the Lord* correctingly terms their so-called deep things (which word alone, as we have said, is here in question) the depths *of Satan;* and thus refers the clause "as *they* speak" only to the former word of the two:—As they babble in their perversion concerning (but He will not take into His lips their blasphemous lie) the deep things "of God."

Suffice, that the rest in Thyatira have not, on the one hand—and this was sufficient for their salvation—*known* these depths, in the sense of the falsely-vaunted knowledge of the prophets and instruments of Jezebel; while, on the other, they have not, in another sense, understood and penetratingly perceived that they were the depths of Satan and not the deep things of God. They have indeed, according to the degree of their knowledge and in part, withstood the influx of the evil,—so much was true; but, on that very account, because they regarded the error of doctrine, and the wickedness of life, as no more than evil which was built upon a good foundation, and therefore did not break with the fundamental power and the fundamental doctrine itself,—they were very hard put to it in *such* a con-

flict with Jezebel, and much more heavily troubled than if their opposition had been pure and perfect. This their Lord knows, and therefore says to them graciously: "I put not upon *you* any *other* burden! That it is not My will to do.—Thus *do* I not (in the correct reading); be assured that I do not so deal with those who are already plagued and oppressed." We must understand—"no *other* burden" (as if for visitation upon your failure to know the evil depths) "besides that harassing oppression under which ye are held by Jezebel's power."[1]

BUT THAT WHICH YE HAVE, HOLD FAST TILL I COME! Not (though there is such an exposition current) — "The *burden* which you have, and besides which I will lay upon you none other!" Ch. iii. 11 teaches us how to understand it: "That gift of grace which ye have received from Me hold fast, and in it abide faithful." The *coming* of the Lord is not only death, as it regards every individual (ver. 10); but, with reference to the whole, also the judicial coming to judgment and separation, as spoken of in ver. 23. The Lord here speaks of that coming with a designed indefiniteness,[2] because generally His judgment upon Thyatira was being variously accomplished in preparatory displays. But it is not His design expressly to say that the duration of this church would extend to His final coming. Let it be observed that to these "the rest," not repentance, but holding fast, is spoken of. Thus there is a threefold distinction: Jezebel herself is hardened, and will not repent, as was already said;—all who commit adultery with her are yet, ver. 22, exhorted to repentance;—finally, this residue, this better part, this small minority, needs not that exhortation. With these last is connected the promise: AND HE THAT OVERCOMETH, AND KEEPETH MY WORKS UNTO THE END, TO HIM WILL I GIVE POWER OVER THE NATIONS. AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON; AS THE VESSELS OF A POTTER SHALL THEY BE BROKEN TO SHIVERS;

[1] The interpretation found in Herder is manifestly incorrect: "I will not upon *you* cast a *strange* burden, not reckon to you others' sins!" That cannot be the meaning of ἄλλο; comp. 1 Tim. v. 22. Nor is βάρος a commandment or prophetical utterance, as if the Lord used a phraseology which was denounced in Jer. xxiii. 33-38.

[2] But the ἄν is not a mark of indefiniteness, as has been said; it is only a strengthening in connection with ἄχρις οὗ or ἕως, as often elsewhere; see 1 Cor. xv. 25.

EVEN AS I RECEIVED OF MY FATHER. AND I WILL GIVE HIM THE MORNING STAR. HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES.

My works, saith the Lord, instead of those works of darkness: "the works which are well-pleasing to Me; the works of love and faith, of service and patience, wrought through My grace—as before said. That is what ye must have, and hold fast; these are your works, according to which I, the Judge, will deal with you. The power is Mine; the reward is, properly speaking, your benefit: yet it will be the actual reward of the faith which received, and of the fidelity which held fast and overcame." *Now*, the "unto the end," as it respects the individuals, is the same with "unto death," ver. 10. Because Thyatira had wrongly anticipated the kingdom of the Lord, and perverted it to sinful dominion, the reward of those who overcome is in opposition described as the true *power* over the nations, as the symbolical, prophetical word promised it to the Son of God, for the antitype and fulfilment of the kingdom of David. Ps. ii. 6–9. That which is there the *sceptre* of the kingdom, is here translated into *staff* or *rod*. The saying of the Psalm recurs twice more, ch. xii. 5, xix. 15, and as here, according to the ancient Greek version, "He will *pasture* them with it," although the Hebrew text speaks of *breaking in pieces*, even in the first member of the sentence. The Hebrew word contains in its root a double allusion, including that of feeding; and the translation which arose out of that fact may be retained in order to indicate, in conformity with the meaning here, that both are included—as well the final destroying judgment of wrath upon the evil-doers, as the victory of the power of grace which opposes in order to salvation, and thus brings into the fold of the Good Shepherd. Both are referred to in the promise of this passage, but especially the *ruling* which wins and saves, as it is abundantly promised to the partakers of the first resurrection, in a final kingdom of the Lord upon earth, ch. xx. 4, and finally in ch. xxii. 5. That which Ps. cxlix. 6–9 foreannounces concerning the honour of God's saints, that they shall rule and bind the nations, means assuredly, first of all, as ver. 6, rightly viewed, gives us to understand, the office of the word and Spirit as opposed to the unbelief of the world; although the final judgment is assuredly not excluded: compare Wisd. iii. 8

and Ecclus. iv. 16 (more strictly translated, "who shall judge the Gentiles") with 1 Cor. vi. 2. What the relation of these promises is to the time of the end, and before the end, we can now only forecast in a very general way, and define only by negations. That power over the nations is *here* held out to those who overcome as a reward, and in contrast with the false power which had been arrogated, is very plain. But we cannot see that there is in it a special severity and keenness, in conformity with the strain of the whole Epistle: for, first, the Epistle is full of gracious encouragement to the believers; and, secondly, the promised power is by no means intended merely of destroying judgment. Herder, therefore, commits a twofold mistake, when he says that "even the reward in that world is in harmony with this character, quite in the spirit of Elias, rigorous and destructive." For, of *that* world, in which there will be nothing to destroy, nothing is here said; and, moreover, our Lord obviates all such misunderstanding of the destructive power, by the additional clause, "Even as I have received of My Father." That is not merely a formula of citation, referring to the second Psalm; but it is a prelude of the promise in the final Epistle, ch. iii. 21. The *as* has the same profound meaning which it had when the Lord in His humiliation first used it, Luke xxii. 29.

But what is the *morning star?* Pious readers of a certain kind pass over this with devout feeling, as something undefined, and form no clear impression of it in their minds; but the expositor must look at it more carefully, according to his best ability. It is despatching it too easily to compare ch. xxii. 16, and say that this concluding word only sums up the whole promise from ver. 26 onwards: "I will thus give *Myself* to him as the true Ruler and King." For, Christ is not called, as a Ruler, the *bright* morning star; and, moreover, the phraseology would be strange and unexampled: "I will give Myself to him," and as the "morning star," meaning again only "My power, the true Christocracy." We think that the "morning star" to *be given* is something different from the Lord Himself so termed, although there is naturally a connection between the two. But must we adduce 2 Pet. i. 19, and refer it *only* to the rising of light in the heart?[1] This again is saying too little; it goes

[1] Zinzendorf translates, without further ado, "I will give him *in his heart* the morning star."

back inappropriately to the beginnings, whereas this concluding promise, like all the rest, manifestly stretches forward to a mysterious future. In a general way, it would be sufficient to interpret: "He that overcometh shall be present at the first *entrance and dawn* of My true kingdom over the nations, and share it with Me!" But this has not enough personal appropriation of the promise; it is not sufficiently concrete. I will *give him*—must have the same meaning as in the similar formulas, vers. 7, 10, 17. We think that the truth of this undoubtedly peculiar expression lies in the middle between the future and the mere preparation for it, as the *morning star* points to such an intermediate position:—not yet the day itself, but the messenger preceding and foreannouncing it. Thus, the overcomer, under the burden and darkness of Thyatira, receives actually already in his heart the prospect and commencing pledge of the light which will rise: this is included, but it is not all the meaning. He has not merely "the living hope and assurance of final victory" (as v. Gerlach says); but is really a participator and receiver of a beginning of the kingdom, of that victory of the true Shepherd and King over the nations, which was future to Thyatira, and would come in the end. And what is that itself? Assuredly the millennial kingdom, to which, in a certain sense, all these promises point; but before that full fulfilment, it is also a specific prelude of it, which is parallel with the previously threatened judgment upon Sardis, as the other side of that coming of the Lord. Thus, to speak plainly out, the so-called Reformation of the Church is signified by the promised morning star, so far as regards the *first* fulfilment; but this assuredly only as the type and earnest of another much more glorious victory of light. If, as we shall be constrained (though to the offence of some) to admit, *Sardis* is the church succeeding the commencement of the Reformation, which brought in no "Philadelphia" (that is, brotherly love), but fell *again* almost into death with its cold orthodoxy, bearing the *name* of new life and purified doctrine; and if, therefore, the work of the Reformation itself, which formed so wonderful an epoch, would otherwise be altogether unmentioned, which we cannot imagine;—it will appear strikingly harmonious that we should read here, by way of close and transition at least, of a morning star of new light and life rising upon the faithful of

Thyatira, as a victory of the sceptre of Christ over the power of the ruling harlot. So far we agree generally with v. Meyer, whose altogether different interpretation of Sardis we cannot accept: "The true evangelical illumination which broke out everywhere about the time of the Reformation, the first new enlightenment was the reward of the heroes of faith in Thyatira, who after the midnight of superstition received the light of Christ, and exercised with Him the office of the morning star which heralds the day." Did not Luther himself go forth from Thyatira as one who broke through and overcame under the pressure of her power and might? Sander expresses this even more strongly than we should be inclined to do:—"Among these overcomers, to whom the iron sceptre and the morning star were given, the Reformers in common are not to be mistaken." [1] Certainly it is here first, at the close and not already in the midst of the period of Thyatira, that we find the true "Elijahs." The reader must now adjust for himself the things which we have given as no more than forecastings, in a domain where strict exposition must needs be at fault. If he cannot agree with us, let him find something better, which will fairly and fully correspond with the well-weighed letter and the connection of the prophetical word.

AND UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN SARDIS WRITE: THESE THINGS SAITH HE THAT HATH THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD, AND THE SEVEN STARS; I KNOW THY WORKS, THAT THOU HAST A NAME THAT THOU LIVEST, AND ART DEAD. The Epistle on which we now enter presents a great difficulty, both for exposition and application. With reverent awe of the Spirit's word in the lips of Jesus, which so wonderfully yields its own self-demonstration, we proceed to give the best interpretation we can: it will be our object to avoid as much as possible all imposition of our own meaning, while shrinking not from the expression of what seems to us the truth. We have hitherto found a chronological progression of *predominant* reference to successive periods in the history of the Church—successive, though in a sense running into each other: this we must still hold fast, unless the sense of the words absolutely disallow it. We have also found, with tolerable certainty, a

[1] He afterwards incorrectly interprets the morning star to be *the Word of God*—which would, according to his view, better suit the sceptre.

prophetical significance even in the names of these churches; and this will be still more plainly seen in the last two. Is *Sardis* to be the sole exception? It is indeed the name most etymologically obscure of all, inasmuch as the Greek language affords no derivation. The Oriental tongues have (since Vitringa) been resorted to for help; and the first meaning given is "*the rest*"[1]—which will, as we shall see, suit well enough. But later learning has traced the name of the ancient metropolis of Lydia (once the rich residence of Crœsus, now existing only in a miserable village) to a Lydian root; and, moreover, refer to it the mysterious *Sepharad* in Obadiah (ver. 20), as meaning the same Sardis, properly "Sevarda" or "Separda." With this last we do not agree, thinking "Sparta" rather probable in Obadiah;[2] but the Sanscrit derivation of the Lydian name will stand—it being equivalent to "*new*, new-born with the year, renewed." Thus much appears to us clear at the outset: Thyatira passes over into Sardis, and that which in the former was "*the rest*," becomes in the latter a "*new*" form and constitution, under another *name* and character. Not as if "the rest" of ver. 2 stood in connection with these (for there the meaning is quite different); but the residue of Thyatira, rewarded with the morning star of a new light and life, form the transition to the *new*, whose subsequent and speedy declension is condemned in Sardis. Accordingly, we should find a consistent meaning for both interpretations of the name at once; but, declining this double meaning, we accept the definition of a *new* form of the Church, as being etymologically the more sure, and better corresponding with facts.

Ebrard thinks it may be observed, that after this fifth Epistle there is no longer any historical progression in the prophetical interpretation; but that Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, are to be sought collectively *in connection with* the *abiding* Thyatira. This much only is true, that generally the several characteristics of the churches are not rigidly defined in strict succession *only;* but that those which follow are prepared for in those which precede, while those which precede continue on in those which follow. So also v. Meyer, with the same funda-

[1] שָׂרִיד frequently in the Old Testament: those who have escaped in battle, the residue after fight, like פָּלִיט.

[2] See Delitzsch in Rudelbach's Zeitschrift, 1851, i. S. 100.

mental view, strangely calls Sardis and Philadelphia the two daughters, and Laodicea the grand-daughter, of Thyatira; but we regard all this as disturbing the clearness and simplicity of the prophecy. Is Sardis, then, according to this notion, "the Catholic, especially the Romish, Church *after* the time of the Reformation?" In that case we cannot see the distinction from Thyatira, since the Reformation did not give a different character to the Church which rejected it; nor can we understand how the Reformed Church is to be first introduced under the name of Philadelphia. All things concur to lead us to the conclusion, that *Sardis*, with her new *name*, to which, nevertheless, the reality does not correspond, with her declension from a first receiving and hearing (ver. 3), must mean pre-eminently the Church which arose from the work of the Reformation. Some commentators (following a very doubtful derivation of the name Sardis) understand the various residues of the old churches, the Greek, Armenian, Coptic, Maronite, Abyssinian, etc., which all were *dead;* while they hold that the interpretation, or the restriction, which refers the whole to the "evangelical Church," to be incorrect and unhistorical. But we think that, without excluding these side-glances, the succession of the Seven Epistles adheres to the main line of history; and to us it seems highly artificial to refer the plural form "Sardes" to *manifold* residues, instead of giving to this, as to every other church, its distinctive character. The historical interpretation must, of course, be in harmony with real history; but then we reasonably ask, Where is the "evangelical" Church not long after the Reformation? Alas, that we could find it and see it! Was the old Catholic Church actually at that time, otherwise than before, dead and dried to "a mummy?" Does not impartial history bear witness, alas, that that actually befell the Church which the Reformers raised up, which was called a new and living church, but was not in reality such? In one of the seven we must find *this* Church, on account of her historical importance: where, then, shall we find her, if not in Sardis after Thyatira? We cannot see her true image in *Philadelphia;* for we ask, Where is then the open door for the little strength? (ver. 8). Apart from missions to the heathen—to which, however, that points—was not rather the door shut again in the Thirty Years' War, and the peace of

Westphalia? Did not the first, preliminary hour of temptation (ver. 10) miserably overpower her, so that she fell into Rationalism? When we read the Epistle to Sardis, without any reference to its prophetic interpretation, we see that the lineaments of its character lamentably but faithfully suit that church which bore the name of being new, of being restored to new life. It is not external persecution that is spoken of, nor internal heresy. "She glories in being alive, but is dead; because the truth, which she once embraced with subjective heartfelt zeal, is now regarded only as an objective treasure for the head; because an awakened Christianity is wanting in her, she makes only masses of Christians." These are the pregnant words of the thoughtful Ebrard, the application of which he shrinks from expressing! We will also let some others speak who have expounded this before us. Father von Brunn, "the old servant who waited for his Lord," though not furnished with much penetration or thorough knowledge, could not avoid coming to the conclusion that "Sardis is the type of the purified Western Church after the Reformation," though he exaggerates the condemnation of her beginning and origin. Sander wrote thirty years ago: "This church represents to us a time when a *dead orthodoxy* restrained and bound the fresh life of the evangelical churches—when the spirit was oppressed by forms—when Scholasticism lifted its head again, and fettered the living Word of God—when life and doctrine were severed, and men were satisfied with a dead knowledge of the truths of salvation; the Church was during this period, from the end of the sixteenth till the latter half of the eighteenth century, a *Sardis*—men were proud of their soundness of faith, and took refuge in their good works, their sacraments and church-going, and felt not the ban which burdened the churches, and the judgments which were at the door." Finally, even Brandt, who deals so strangely with the Seven Epistles generally, makes almost the same observations in his comment upon Sardis.

After this anticipating introduction—necessary in order to show the transition from Thyatira to Sardis, where otherwise there might appear to be a sudden spring to an unconnected new beginning—we shall perhaps be able better to understand the details of what is here spoken. That the Lord describes Himself here, as in ch. ii. 1, as holding *all* the seven stars,

corresponds entirely with the critical period of this new beginning of the Church. But, instead of the seven *candlesticks*, He now mentions the light and life itself which was typified in them and imparted to them; in order, as it were, to say that this did not result from the mere "frame" of the candlesticks. *Spirit* is *life;* therefore, "He that hath the Spirit, that is, the Living One with whom is all spirit and life, and who therefore hath no pleasure in those who have the name to live and yet are dead." It is not so much in Isa. xi. 2 that we find the *Seven* Spirits of God[1] (of which St John also in Rev. i. 4 and v. 6 speaks), as in Zech. iv. 2, 10, iii. 9, where they correspond to the seven-branched candlestick as the seven all-penetrating eyes of the Lord. These seven "living Spirits" are a typical expression for the reality of the manifold influences of the One Holy Spirit. The glorified Lord of glory will not go back, as it were, to the position of His humble humanity, and say, "I am He who was anointed most fully with the Holy Spirit;"—but, when He terms Himself the Possessor of the Seven Spirits before the throne of God, He thereby testifies His essential Divinity, just as in ch. ii. 18 for Thyatira. But here *Sardis* is referred to the *variety* of the churches which in the Lord's presence are regarded as a unity, because she, in her presumption, misunderstood that truth; even as to Ephesus the variety was rather regarded as a *unity*. The *Lutheran* Church especially, the most expressly developed stem and stock of the evangelical, needs to be reminded that every candlestick receives its specific light only from the entire unity and fulness of the Divine gifts of the Spirit.

I know thy *works!* Thus stands here also at the outset the unaltered formula of the judicial sentence (as again in vers. 8 and 15), although the condemnation proceeds that the true and perfect works are *not* found among them! "I know how it is with thy works; that is, thou hast the name that thou livest, and art *dead!*"[2] Judgment could scarcely be uttered more keenly and decisively upon any church than this. It is literally still more rejecting than the "*lukewarm*" of Laodicea; but it is not to be understood in its most literal severity, as we learn from vers. 2 and 4. That which remained was not yet dead, and

[1] Although even there the seven-number is not accidental.

[2] The first ὅτι is not *for*, but dependent explanatorily upon οἶδα.

there were some among them undefiled;—yet the Faithful One speaks thus keenly and zealously, we might say thus extremely, at the beginning, in order to awaken by such words of fear those who were almost dead. We are taught everywhere by the language of these Epistles to interpret their expressions according to their *relative* power and significance, without unduly pressing the letter. As people are found, and the words suit them, they are addressed: thus did the Lord address them when upon earth, and thus He still addresses them from heaven. Sardis has *the* name—or *a* name, which is equivalent[1]—that she lives; but the Lord tells her that she is dead: this language has almost as condemnatory a tone as ch. ii. 9 concerning the Jews who were not Jews; and may, according to the analogy of Rom. ii. 17, etc., be interpreted of the so-called Church of the simple word and pure doctrine. False doctrine is not objected to her; the *name* has consequently a half-true ground: all the worse is it, that that name should be made the occasion of vain-glorying in opposition to the truth of life. The parallel which has been sought in St Paul's words, 1 Tim. v. 6,[2] concerning an individual person, is something different; for here, amid predominant death, the *collecitce whole* approaching a condition of death, there is yet remaining a germ of life which may be awakened. But it is with sufficient earnestness declared to us "Protestants," glorying as such in opposition to the Romish Church, that *life* and a living Christendom is no mere name, not anything that may be borne in the mouth, and assuredly not matter of vain self-glorying. But, on the other hand, the exhortation based upon the *name* which we bear, has ever been, and will always be, a very piercing and convincing exhortation. The beautiful name of life, which is here held up in condemnation, is indeed not the ambiguous appellation "Protestant," in use against Rationalism as well as Fanaticism in its two extremes; but the name, presupposed with a secret hint which the course of history will solve, of the new and renewed, the pure and the purified, Church, the Church of the pure word and uncorrupt faith.

Oh that it had been in all from the beginning the uncorrupt

[1] The article before ὄνομα is not in the correct text.

[2] Ζῶσα τέθνηκε is *dead* in connection with a living body, and more rigorously exclusive than the only seemingly equivalent νεκρός, *dead*.

faith, or that it had remained so! It is deeply humbling for the history of our Church and Reformation, that the Lord does not say for Sardis one word about the great *conflict*, which yet *first* was carried on sincerely and not without victory in His might: He says not here, as elsewhere, anything about *love* and *patience;* yea, He does not expressly mention (nor did He, indeed, to Ephesus) *faith*, the great critical word of the Reformation, in the urging of which the Reformation was sound. And wherefore? Because He has not in view, and does not address His Epistle to, that first *outset* of a revivification of Christendom, which, while it was not unworthy of praise, did not need to be praised; but the *church* which sprang from it, and which both deserved and needed blame. We hear, however, in the following condescending words, that He does not reject or cast away this church, any more than any of the others; but that He so severely addresses her on account of her high vocation and name.

BE WATCHFUL, AND STRENGTHEN THE THINGS WHICH REMAIN, THAT ARE READY TO DIE: FOR I HAVE NOT FOUND THY WORKS PERFECT BEFORE GOD.

Not simply, *Awake*, thou that sleepest, and rise up from death! nor, as Luther's translation might be misunderstood, *Be* from this time more watchful than hitherto! but, *Become* watchful! Become what befits thy name, a watcher, a truly awakened church, lifting up aloud the awakening voice of the word of God! The morning star hath called thee into life—arise, then, and become light! Thou wast, and wouldst be, a watchman who should herald My dawn—alas, thou thyself art not enough awake! This word of the Lord to Sardis is the voice of the true "watchman of Zion;" and it gives us the legitimate superscription of that chapter in the history of His Church which we call the Reformation-history: there was to the waiting Christians of Thyatira a breaking morning, though the day as yet was wanting. It was a wakening, but not to full wakefulness; sleep soon followed again. What is it that the evangelical Church lacks for the consummation of her good beginning? *Awakening* and *watchfulness*, the internal spiritual life of her people, who have received and admitted the pure doctrine! Who is there that will or that can deny this? Who dares challenge with incorrectness this application to *our* Sardis? To Peter, who denied Him, the Lord once said upon earth,

"When thou art converted, *strengthen* thy brethren!" To the Church, which *confesses* Him, He now speaks from heaven the same word: "When thou, by repentance, hast risen from thy weakness, yea rather art become truly alive, watchful, and strong, then strengthen *the remainder*, which with thy confession has scarcely received life, and in thy continued confession has drawn near to utter death!" We see and learn that the mere confession even of His name is not enough; it is not pure doctrine that avails, but the living life. *The remainder:*—this word may indeed allude to ch. ii. 24; but by way of contrast—we might almost say *ironical* contrast. In Thyatira there was a little residue of faithful ones, out of whom the new confessors arose; here, on the contrary, there is an inert, dead mass and majority, which is called, in opposition to the addressed and awakened kernel of the Church, and for its rulers and guides, the Rest—and in the neuter, just as a mass, which is without personal life in the individuals. "Which *would die*" (so in the original): that is, was in the act of dying, over which death impended, and which will altogether die *unless* thou watchest and strengthenest it! Here we are told, on decisive authority, what was the need, and what the neglect, from the beginning of the work of Reformation; what the only means of invigoration and life for the dead communities over which we mourn. It is the special cure of souls, which our fanatical young Lutheranism declares to be needless![1] Not the people into the Church, but the Church into the people! *Home Missions*, rightly understood, and rightly conducted![2] More correctly, and more conformably to Scripture and fact—The right constitution of our churches, the pastoral and diaconate ministries in, and in connection with, the office of the word! Exhortation, edification, and comfort of souls; governing them not by ecclesiastical police, but by true spiritual discipline! These are the things which are wanting, and they alone will repair the mischief which the Lord here rebukes, not without a glance back to the reproof in Ezekiel: "The diseased have ye not *strength-*

[1] One Potel in Gnadau says: "A particular cure of souls does not exist, other than the true administration of the office of the keys!!"—*Evang. Kirchenzeitung* 1857, Nr. 85.

[2] "Which are taking the place of the *Lutheran ruling offices!*"—laments the same Potel.

ened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them" (Ezek. xxxiv. 4, where in ver. 16 the promise follows—I Myself will do it!).

Luther, when urged to establish ecclesiastical discipline and the pastoral cure of souls, said, I have not the men fit for it; and this littleness of faith in the strong believer has wrought very great mischief. *Primarily* of this fundamental deficiency in our ecclesiastical constitution as Lutherans, and *at the same time* of others in the Reformed, the Lord's judgment speaks—I have *not* found *thy works perfect!* The works are rightly objected to the church of faith; for it is through no other than a want of faith that the works, weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, are found too light and *not complete*. What was the ecclesiastical constitution established by the Reformation but a foundation, and an imperfect one, a work not thoroughly carried out! It is not that, according to the foolish notions now prevalent, we are wanting in a Romanist ecclesiastical authority, and in an enforced hypocritical unity, in the official prerogatives of a vain-glorious church-system; what we have lacked from the beginning, is the prosecution to its full issue of preaching, for the conversion and religious life of a Christian people. The nearness to death of this most abundant residue should teach *us*, who by the Lord are held responsible, to mark *our own* supineness and neglect, in order that we may arouse ourselves in alarm, instead of indulging in vain-gloryings. And how can we make the works perfect, how can this residue be strengthened, but by ourselves being invigorated in the might of the Lord? He who utters with *I* His decisive judgment—"I have not found perfect"—condescendingly adds for confirmation, as if we would not receive it from Himself, *before My God!* As all things are before God, they are in their reality before Him. In ch. ii. 4 it was said, "In the paradise of My God (ver. 28, of My Father, and so in ch. iii. 5; compare, further, ver. 12 with ver. 21). It is remarkable that in the Revelation of St John the Lord speaks several times of His God (as St Paul often speaks of the God and Father of Christ), pointing back to the first words of the risen Jesus in John xx. 17; for now, testifying from heaven,

He will avow Himself to be properly and perfectly in all things the glorified *God-man*.

REMEMBER THEREFORE HOW THOU HAST RECEIVED AND HEARD, AND HOLD FAST AND REPENT! We now hear, what our exposition has taken for granted, as it is here confirmed, that the church of Sardis took its rise from a new beginning, from the laying of a new foundation of *receiving* and *hearing*—a receiving of grace, a hearing of the word. Thus the work of the Reformation itself, and in itself, so far as it restored through God's grace the preaching of the true Word of God, is not rebuked in the Epistle to Sardis,[1] but is rather most plainly recognised. It is not blamed as a breach with the old and false church; it is not condemned as a self-originating work which elevated subjective reason against tradition and authority, or anything of that kind. The perfect right is thus conceded: Sardis received and heard from the Lord that upon which she was built. The Lord addresses her as St Paul addresses Timothy: "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me; keep this good deposit!" (2 Tim. i. 13, 14). As Ephesus was to *remember* the life of her first love, so Sardis was to remember the preaching which she had first received. She has not fallen from the truth of her doctrine, she *has* still what she must keep and maintain, even while her repentance is urged. But she has forgotten *how* she received and heard it at the beginning: this HOW, which must not be overlooked, but must be understood as equivalent to *what*, gives the proper key for the whole. She had once *received* it, taken it to herself in the right way, "with holy heartfelt zeal, but now only with the head; once she had heard it in the inner man, now only with the outward ear."[2] Indeed, this first good beginning of the right *how* does not extend very far, certainly not to the "final close of the confession" in the *Formula Concordiæ*, or afterwards in that of Dort. We need only take the trouble to read through Planck's "Origin of Protestant Doctrine," and we shall find

[1] "The thing itself is not rejected. That which is *God's* work must endure. But there are people who take the form only. This is the age of Sardis, and we may well observe whither it tends." (Berlen. Bib.)

[2] Which we once more gladly quote from Ebrard. Certainly the *how* of receiving is meant, and not of God's giving: hence the Berlenb. Bible is wrong: "How mercifully, richly, mildly, seasonably," etc.

(after all abatements for his perversions, which are not slight) so much of the undeniably human and false in the "how" of the reduction of the Word of God to ecclesiastical doctrine, that we shall be constrained to remember and repent of this "how" itself. It is not concerning that *fresh, pure beginning* of the testimony to which the Lord refers us, but concerning the progress of it, that the following too strong expressions of von Brunn hold good: "We shall not wonder at the severe declaration of the Lord, if we bear in mind that the sum of all doctrine is not a scientific estimate of dogma, but love out of a pure heart and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned; and if we remember, further, that in the time of the Reformation this latter was not the characteristic either of the teachers or the people, but that they were actuated by a general disgust at the secularity of the Pope and the assumptions of the priesthood, combined with a deepening insight into the oppressive corruptions which had insinuated themselves into the Church. For we cannot perceive in that time much (?) of that spiritual life which the Lord requires of His disciples. Where there was any real amendment of the Church, it was the work less of effective sermons than of learned disputations, which proved by conclusions, based upon Scripture, that the charges urged against the Papacy found their warrant in the Word of God." From this, much of its exaggeration must be deducted; but the truth remains, that the work begun in the Spirit was not in the Spirit entirely, or even to a great extent, carried out.[1] Alas! how soon did the Church of the Reformation require as a whole that other exhortation, "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called, which some professing, have erred concerning the faith!" (1 Tim. vi. 20, 21). *Repent* of thy human perversion of the treasure of grace entrusted to thee! Be watchful, that thou mayest mark it, and put it away!

IF, THEREFORE, THOU SHALT NOT WATCH, I WILL COME (UPON THEE) AS A THIEF, AND THOU SHALT NOT KNOW WHAT HOUR I WILL COME UPON THEE.[2] We hear in these words the echo of those sayings of our Lord concerning watching and

[1] The same writer adds afterwards: "Thus we cannot be astonished that in most of the religious wars of that time, Divine help was withdrawn from the Protestants."

[2] The first "upon thee" is probably, though not certainly, spurious.

the coming of the thief, Matt. xxiv. 42–51; to which the Apostles also refer, 1 Thess. v. 2, and 2 Pet. iii. 10: see once more Rev. xvi. 15. In this expression the advancing glance draws nearer to the *final* day of judgment. The thief does not say beforehand that he will come; but the Lord, in His merciful fidelity, tells us so abundantly. And when He so comes at the end, He will, in righteous retribution, entirely take away all that had been received from Him, but not preserved and diligently used. If He comes to a church, it will be, what fundamentally signifies the same thing, to remove its candlestick from its place; their old church-treasure, which they have hid in the napkin of idleness, or dissipated in proud contention, will be taken away from those who hitherto possessed it. *When* the final removing judgment will come upon Sardis, after its judgment through Rationalism, we know not: it may be much nearer than we think; and possibly hastened by our present unrighteous and impure zeal for the re-establishment of *old things* in *that* church whose good name speaks of that which is livingly *new*. But when Sardis falls, the time will follow, as we perceive already in the preparatory beginning, of Philadelphia and Laodicea together. As in the faithful of Thyatira the reformation was before prepared for, so the pure and living in Sardis form the secret root of the Philadelphian church. To these the gracious words of the Lord now turn, that right may be fittingly done to the other side.

BUT THOU HAST A FEW NAMES IN SARDIS WHICH HAVE NOT DEFILED THEIR GARMENTS; AND THEY SHALL WALK WITH ME IN WHITE, FOR THEY ARE WORTHY. Only in the Epistles to Thyatira and Sardis are the names mentioned twice; and in each case when the faithful are referred to. The *but* coming first (wanting in the translation) has a tone of grace after the threatening. Here it is said, *Thou hast;*—and the presence of these worthy ones in the church, now first late mentioned, is represented to the angel of the church as a treasure in his possession which had been hitherto as it were unknown, or at least not rightly estimated, and by the use of which he might come to true repentance.[1] They are *few*, but in them thou hast many: if thou only knewest how to value them, as I count them *worthy!*

[1] The Rest in Thyatira, and the Remainder in Sardis, form a contrast. Similarly, to Pergamos—*Thou hast* heretics; but here only—Thou *hast* faithful.

Names are spoken of: not as belonging to celebrated personages, the mention of whom would be enough to mark them out; nor as meaning that "*among* thy names, for thou hast many distinguished men of name, yet only a few which have any value before Me!" For, assuredly, those who are meant here are among the less known, manifest only to the Lord, and whom we must seek among those who have been called the "silent in the land." *Names* are equivalent to persons, in ch. xi. 13, as in Acts i. 15. Nevertheless, there is something in the background, when the expression is used as here. Before, the dead mass, which together had the "name" that it lived, was called the Remainder, in the neuter: in opposition to that, we have now the names or the persons known to the Lord, and mentioned with honour before His God; for personal sanctification in the personal life, saved *personalities*, worthy of eternal salvation, are what is essential! This is here asserted against those who, like their modern representatives, decried in a wrong spirit the "subjective" out of deference to an ecclesiastical "objectivity"—as if the blessed God could take any pleasure in a glorious liturgy offered by dead souls!

The pure and undefiled service of God, is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world (James i. 27). Sinners defile their garments, their inner man, by the lusts of the flesh, as the unclean body spots a garment (Jude 23). This is a profound symbol of an essential truth; as, according to the same fundamental idea, Isa. lxiv. 6 terms all *our own* natural righteousness a filthy (Heb. stained with the specific defilement of impure flesh) garment. To the church of Sardis there is now promised, and magnified, the wedding-garment, which not only *covers*, but in a wonderful manner takes away, our shame—the righteousness of Christ through faith. Concerning *this* garment, too, it is further said, that only a few of those who have actually once put it on, have preserved it unspotted; or, without figure, that only on and in few has justification exerted its full power unto that sanctification which is valid before God, and which He looks for as the fruit of that tree. Only those who are sanctified receive the inheritance (Acts xxvi. 18)—only those who are pure in heart behold the face of the Pure. Heb. xii. 14; Matt. v. 8. Their reward is—as the Lord who *walketh* amid the candlesticks, ch. ii. 1, promises—They shall

walk with Me, that is, stand before Me in confirmed life, and shall *be with Me* in the region of eternal life (ch. xxii. 3, 4), where will not be a stationary stillness, but rather the abundance of holy activity. And *in white*, resplendent vestures of glorified bodies, which will then be given to the righteous as the bright manifestation of their inward purity and righteousness; as in ver. 5 the great promise is resumed, and as in ch. xix. 8, 14, this book, throughout so wonderfully woven into the unity of a great plan, repeats and explains the promise. Not that "walking *with* Me in white garments" means "going clothed in white like Myself"—for in the title, ver. 1, the Lord's bright garments were not made prominent; yet there is a *similarity* (not equality) between His vesture and that of His people, as Phil. iii. 21 declares. His righteousness in the beginning, His holiness in the process, His glory at the end, all are to become ours. But glory is for the holy alone; only of the guests found thus clothed does He say—They are *worthy;* they are, though by grace alone, yet through the acceptance and preservation of that grace, as much as is in man, worthy of the reward. (The contrast for the condemned comes after in ch. xvi. 6: compare also Matt. xxii. 8.)

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. The figure of white or bright garments, which here in this book points to the glorification of the body, and probably also to a previous transitional state, at the same time goes back to the putting on of the righteousness which is the gift of the grace of God: thus is it interpreted expressly in ch. xix. 8. It is the priestly pure garment, first of all (comp. ch. xv. 6), in which, Zech. iii. 4, 5, the unclean high priest, was arrayed when his sin was removed; the robe of righteousness, Is. lxi. 10. But this festal wedding-garment, or "imputed" righteousness, not being perfectly valid without the holiness which grows out of it—which the Reformation-theory, and the subsequent dogmatics of the Church, did not sufficiently emphasize, however correctly acknowledged—the same garment is finally exhibited as resplendent glory. Thus, in the mean-

ing of the promise, the *bright* garments are something other and greater than the *clean*, of which they are the reward. He that overcometh, even *he*, only he and no other:—this has a specific emphasis in the Greek, which cannot well be translated.[1] As Sardis, on the whole, has, alas! only the name to *live*, so, on the contrary, the *names* of those who overcome in the conflict with this death, twice mentioned and acknowledged with emphasis by the Lord, are to be inscribed in the *book of life*, where they shall remain and never be blotted out or taken away. This last appears, in passing, to be directed against the Reformed predestination dogmatics, even as the former word concerning the true wedding-garment was directed against the practical perversion of the Lutheran doctrine of justification. The *book of life*—see further ch. xiii. 8, xx. 12, xxi. 27—occurs also Phil. iv. 3; as also in the Old Testament Ps. lxix. 28; Is. iv. 3; Dan. xii. 1 (vii. 10). It is of most weighty significance in connection with this, that, in the *first* place of Holy Writ in which this phrase occurs, Ex. xxxii. 32, we read of a *blotting out* of the book (like Ps. lxix. 28); as also that there is not in the entire Scripture, not even the book of Revelation, any mention of a contrasted "book of death." This intimates to us that men redeemed by Christ are, through a primary gracious will of God, appointed and written down for salvation; while the lost are themselves the guilty cause that they must be rejected and blotted out. And even this last promise for Sardis confirms our prophetic interpretation of this church, which unprejudiced exposition suggests, but which we do not insist upon as infallible. To the church of *Confessions* the Lord speaks only of His *confessing* those who overcome in her; for this is most plainly involved in the concluding word, which almost literally refers to Matt. x. 32 and Luke xii. 8, pointing again, like ver. 3, forward to the last day of judgment.[2] Herder goes too far when he says that the *whole* Epistle is written in the words of Christ, which He spoke while yet upon earth; but certainly there are many such allusions to His own word, now expressly opened up anew to

[1] Generally, we cannot exactly reproduce the interchangeable forms in the concluding promises, τῷ νικῶντι—ὁ νικῶν; and in the case of Sardis the additional ουτως, for which we cannot accept the οὕτως of the critics, which yields no proper meaning.

[2] But the Lord cannot *now* continue to say—Before My Father *in heaven*.

this church. We may refer, in conclusion, to Luke xxii. 32, Matt. xxiv. 42–44 (also what follows there in its impressive adaptation to Sardis!), xxii. 8, 11, x. 32.

AND TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA WRITE; THESE THINGS SAITH HE THAT IS HOLY, HE THAT IS TRUE, HE THAT HATH THE KEY OF DAVID; HE THAT OPENETH, AND NO MAN SHUTTETH; AND SHUTTETH, AND NO MAN OPENETH. The Lydian city of Philadelphia, so called from its builder, King Attalus, surnamed Philadelphus or lover of his brother, was the seat of a small church in the time of St John; and here gives its beautiful name, in the prophetical meaning of the heavenly writer, as the symbol of a period and character of the Church which has for its signature *brotherly love*. This is of all the names the most obvious in its prophetic meaning, so that the confusion which has been fallen into by some expositors seems to us matter of wonder. Even the circumstance that Philadelphia lay at the foot of Mount Tmolus, *close to Sardis*,[1] is not without useful application. If we have in any measure found the interpretation of Sardis, the transition now to the next presentation of the Church suggests itself at once: the faithful in Thyatira prepared the way for Sardis, and now the acknowledged kernel of Sardis comes out into prominence as Philadelphia; while, on the other hand, only out of the reproved mass could Laodicea spring. Philadelphia, placed in the midst between Sardis and Laodicea, is the counterpart of both. She does not glory in her name, nor does she think herself rich and satiated; but is blessed in her little strength and faithful patience, and commended and encouraged far beyond all the other churches. Not even Ephesus stands so entirely in the Lord's presence. We are forbidden, by the sad and incontrovertible history of the church which sprang from the so-called Reformation, to interpret Philadelphia generally, and without qualification, of *that* church. But it is at the same time evident that a Philadelphia could not follow Sardis, and an evil Laodicea again follow her, in definite and exclusive periods; the clear meaning of the word, apart from mere prophetic interpretation, will constrain us to adopt the view to which we have already given preliminary expression. If, generally, the

[1] About five Roman miles nearer than Sardis to Thyatira, which are the two least distances of the whole.

intermingling presentations of the Church from the beginning exhibited their respective characteristics as more or less passing into each other and co-existing, it is obvious that this will be still more the case as the end approaches: Philadelphia, as well as Laodicea, are prepared for in Sardis, and reach onwards to the close of the Church's history in the coming of the Lord.

We cannot say (with Meyer) that the attributes of the Lord's first manifestation are exhausted, so that He must give Himself new names for this new church; nor (with Ebrard) maintain that the title here given is no longer derived from the first description of His person, but chosen with strict relation to the condition of the church addressed. For, the *key* certainly does look back to the final saying of ch. i. 18; and what precedes is only an addition similar to "Son of God," in the Epistle to Thyatira, and already prepares the way for the concluding summary to Laodicea (ver. 14). The Amen, the True and Faithful Witness, coincides almost exactly with "He that is holy, and He that is true." Later, in ch. vi. 10, the same description returns; and ch. xix. 11 substitutes very evidently "*faithful* and true." The *Holy One* reminds us of the phrase which occurs almost only in Isaiah, The Holy One of Israel. Thus is termed there the Lord God, in whose place the Son of God appears here, not only as being beyond all comparison (Is. xl. 25), but in His revelation of Himself as *Love ever faithful*,[1] glorious, and to be praised above all things; love *true* to itself in condescending greatness, and in the greatness of its condescension. Both united in one here are the expression of sublime, rejoicing, protecting complacency in that church, which had beyond others kept His word without denying His name (vers. 8, 10), and derived its own name from love. He that is holy is also He that is true, who never denieth Himself, never changeth; as in 1 Sam. xv. 29 was said of the *Abiding One* in Israel.[2]

This Holy and True One, faithful and unchangeable in the pure love which is His essence, has now, as the Son, supreme authority for the government of the house and kingdom of God upon earth; in His hand is the *key of David*. These words,

[1] We would request those who have the opportunity to consult our commentary on this passage in Isaiah, as also the remarks upon John xvii. 11.

[2] Luther translates, without any good meaning, *der Held*. The Hebrew is נֶאֱמָן, one of the profoundest words of the Old Testament.

which once more go back to the Old Testament types, are easily understood; especially if we connect with them the passage, Is. xxii. 22, which is almost verbally quoted in the context. Opening and shutting are suggested by the key: first, with reference to the inhabitants, *opening* is concerned, and this in the Hebrew gives its name to the key; but shutting also is involved, and this gives the key its name in the Greek, as also in the German. Reference is here made to the key of supreme authority in both respects; and that holds good which is figuratively said in Job xii. 14, "When He shutteth, no man can open!" But no man can shut when He in His grace, as it is always and everywhere His good pleasure to do, openeth! *The keys*, in the plural (in ch. i. 18 still more solemnly and expressly used of *the gates*, the entrance and exit of death and of hell), become now—not without connection with the authority of the keys generally, which is given to the conqueror for *all* doors of every kind—the key of *David*. Stilling would strangely interpret this of "the subterranean regions;" but the typical David had nothing to do with the opening of Hades, or any other subterranean and hidden region; and, moreover, there was not any necessity for the threatening (or promising) reference to death and hell, in the case of this faithful church. The superscription refers at the outset, by anticipation, to the giving of an *open door*, ver. 8. In the book of Isaiah, where ch. xxii. gives us a representative picture of the whole on a small scale, the proud treasurer Shebna being cast out of his office, and *Eliakim* (that is, "the Lord will set up") being put in his place, we have the expression in the fuller historical style—the key *of the house* of David. But here the same meaning is given in a more condensed form, "the key of David," in order to make prominent the typical phrase, and to exhibit Christ as the fulfiller of the type, the true King *David* over the house, and kingdom, and people of God. When we penetrate more deeply into its prophetic significance for Philadelphia, there may appear to be another meaning in the background, beside the opening and shutting of the door, in the success of the Word for the spread of the kingdom. For He speaks here, who also in Matt. xvi. 19 spoke of keys in His house and kingdom upon earth, which were to be given to His disciples. And we mark that, after in Thyatira the "successors of St Peter,"

and not merely they, but their imitators in Sardis,[1] had carried the doctrine of the keys to most exaggerated perversion, the Lord comes forward Himself to Philadelphia:—I, the supreme Holder of all authority of the keys, to receive and to reject in My Church; I have never given up this power, but use it Myself from age to age, I alone in holiness and truth![2]

I KNOW THY WORKS: BEHOLD, I HAVE SET BEFORE THEE AN OPEN DOOR, WHICH NO MAN CAN SHUT; FOR THOU HAST A LITTLE STRENGTH, AND HAST KEPT MY WORD, AND HAST NOT DENIED MY NAME. To the absolute *I know thy works!* which stands here alone for uniformity, is appended, without any mention of faith or love, the encouraging declaration of what *the Lord* had done for Philadelphia, which, speaking of what was given, promises still more; and then first follows, as the commended susceptibility for the Lord's gift, their little, but faithfully-used strength. "Well for him, whose characterisation requires nothing more to be said than what the Lord has done in him! A sign that such a man has *let* the Lord accomplish His work." Thus does Ebrard keenly and truly describe the "noble delineation" of the state of Philadelphia. The "behold," so frequent in the ancient prophets, which was spoken only *once* to Smyrna as noting the temptation, and only *once* to Thyatira as conveying a threatening, and to Laodicea *once* more in connection with warning and exhortation, ver. 20, is addressed to Philadelphia *thrice* in connection with the highest grace and honour.[3] The liberal Giver, who giveth everything out of His all-governing hand, hath *given* before this church an *open door*, which shall be shut of no man, but shall be more and more open in spite of all opposers. This is *not* a door of access or entrance into His "temple" (into which Philadelphia does not need admission); but it corresponds to a phrase of the great Apostle, which the Holy Ghost suggested and stamped upon more than one passage of the New Testament. St Paul wrote from *Ephesus*:—A great door of full activity is opened to me, and there are many enemies (who shall,

[1] According to Luther's well-known saying: There is no little priest who might not make a little pope.

[2] Philadelphia is the symbol of a church in which the office of the keys is truly administered. Leyrer.

[3] In ver. 11 it is a spurious reading from ch. xxii. 7.

nevertheless, not be able to shut it): 1 Cor. xvi. 9. Similarly again in 2 Cor. ii. 12; and most plainly, Col. iv. 3: Pray for us, that God may open to us *a door* of *the word*.[1] This entrance, which the messengers of the Lord find for their preaching (1 Thess. i. 9), includes at the same time, as it is said before the Church to the glory of God in Acts xiv. 27, the opening of *the door of faith* for the Heathen, as an earnest of that time when the gates of the city of God stand open day and night for the Gentiles, whereof Is. lx. 11, and Rev. xxi. 25, 26, prophesy. Thus the Lord promises a prosperous and unhindered career of *missions*, as in the apostolical time to Ephesus, to Philadelphia, the final and most favoured church, the plain prophetic name of which speaks of entrance into the *union* of brotherly love. Here we have the key for the opening of the mystery of this church, this most brightly shining star and candlestick.

We ask whether that is of itself appropriate to the first church of the Reformation; and let history give the answer. Even the entrance into the rest of Christendom was presently shut again, and Jezebel remained enthroned in unchanged Thyatira; but the mission to the Heathen, of which the word pre-eminently speaks, was long held back. Richter, the Inspector of Missions, might have learned in his official capacity something better than what he writes in his Bible (with much else that is confused and arbitrary): "Many seek Philadelphia merely in attempts at union; but the Evangelical Church, especially the Lutheran, does not *make* union, but *is* union." We understand this self-contradicting word too well to be misled by it. Certainly we do not seek the Philadelphian community in ecclesiastical-political *attempts* at union; nor alone or pre-eminently in that which *now*, under the beautiful name of union, is feebly and preparatorily sought after; but still less do we seek it in that Lutheran Church which recognises no other union than that of entering like good Catholics into *her* bosom. The very name of *Lutheran*, so firmly held fast—we hold to this, let men say what they will!—plainly denies that immediate dependence on the one only Name in which salvation

[1] Then no longer defended against enemies, as a castle and fortress. Then will come into it those who peacefully enter, whereas before conquerors went forth amongst them from it.

is given to all men under heaven, and does not acknowledge the walking of the Lord amid the seven golden candlesticks. The true Philadelphia must be willing to abolish, and must actually in reparation abolish, the great unjustifiable division and controversy through which Sardis came to her end; she must not hold fast the fundamental error which has crept in, and which has been so lamentably refuted by all history, that *life* and the right of belonging to the "true church" depends upon a mere human system of "pure doctrine," going beyond the fundamental doctrines of salvation. As it respects, on the other hand, the aspirations after union, which have in earlier and later times proceeded from a pure Philadelphian mind, we agree with the Berlenb. Bible, which says, "Who will despise the day of small things? (Zech. iv. 10.) How small was the number [better, how little was the strength] from which Philadelphia was to arise as a testimony! just as out of the remainder of Sardis Laodicea was to spring."

It is a position of sure and profound truth, both for theory and practice, that *Union* and *Missions* stand or fall together in the Church; in their inmost principle the two are one, being the *expression of life* among Christians, under two several but mutually confirming aspects. So far as believers are perfected into one, the world knoweth the power and glory of the Lord in this Church. Job. xvii. 23. Richter says, that "the work of missions must be carried on through the union of all true Christians, of all confessions, in common fellowship of labour." This is the character and seal of Philadelphia. Has not the Lord, since the beginning of this century — without despising former endeavours — been openly illustrating and fulfilling His "*Behold*, I have given you an open door!" in the fellowship of those who have been seeking the true union? And will the more bigoted Lutheran Missions, which despise or know nothing of this blessing, have equal success? We wait a while, and shall see.

Philadelphia was first most clearly illustrated by the Church of the Brethren; and Luther himself long before might have been admonished by their ancestors, the old Bohemian Brethren, not to neglect the foundation, the lack of which was exhibited in the words to Sardis, ver. 2. And, notwithstanding all the error and weakness which adhered to their institution, they

were actually the first who carried forth the missionary standard. Not that we would interpret (like Brunn, but without any excuse *now*) Philadelphia as meaning Herrnhut: this little company, and its little strength, was always from the beginning too small for that. But this interpretation was, when it was first put forward, based upon a right principle, and pointed in the right direction. We trust that the Lord will raise up, out of all the manifold efforts after union, the pure germ of a much larger community of brethren:—how soon or how late, we know not; men, alas! have too much power to hinder the work of His grace.

THOU HAST.—In the same half-praising, half-blaming formula, beginning in ch. ii. 6, it was said to Sardis, Thou hast only a *few* who have not defiled themselves! Now, to the collected and combining Philadelphia, on the other hand, Thou hast *a little strength* (or *might*, to war and conquer):—but on that account she is blessed of the Lord, who doeth great things from beginning to end by little means. Rieger remarks, that the manner in which this mention of the little strength is woven into the testimony of the Faithful One, gives us to suppose that "the angel of Philadelphia has the words given back to him which, in his lamentation before the Lord, he had frequently made use of." He who knows and feels his own weakness, depends all the more faithfully on the Lord's grace for the weak: only in this spirit will the Lord's pure and really *evangelical* Church—in the midst of Sardis and Laodicea, and not without some from Thyatira too, standing in the Lord's might upon the basis of union—go on more and more abundantly to conquer; and the doors at the threshold of Christendom everywhere shall no more be shut against her. "God is more quick with the open door than we are;—were only the people ready, who would begin with a feeble few!" (Berl. Bible.) The Lord here encourages the little strength by pointing to a blessing already received, and would have it more earnest in its endeavours after more; for fidelity in that which is least has its own appropriate promise. Only to the Philadelphians does the Faithful Witness give the perfect testimony—*Thou* hast kept My word, *Thou* hast in thy sound confessions *not denied* My name; though doubtless Philadelphia was not without temptation enough. He adds for the faithful a further and higher promise: "As the Heathen

will hear *thy* voice, My voice in My word spoken by thee, so shall many come from false Christendom, and give thee thy due honour—that is, give it to Me in thee."

BEHOLD, I WILL MAKE THEM OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN, WHICH SAY THEY ARE JEWS, AND ARE NOT, BUT DO LIE; BEHOLD, I WILL MAKE THEM TO COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE THY FEET, AND TO KNOW THAT I HAVE LOVED THEE. As the exhortation to Thyatira began with threatening and rebuke, so the true and genuine Philadelphia receives her exhortation at once combined with promise in vers. 9, 10 — and only the short word, ver. 11, follows as simple exhortation. For the *fifth* and last time in these Epistles, the Lord from heaven mentions *Satan*, and without any Jewish phraseology or figure; as we remarked upon Acts xxvi. 28. Smyrna's position and trial, ch. ii. 9, returns; rather, it has continued on since then — which is another hint of the mutually interwoven meaning of these seven descriptions of the Church's state. The expression is made more intense, and now runs—They are not, *but do lie*. It is obvious of itself, that only presumptuous, false *Christians* can here be meant.[1] That which was promised in Is. xlix. 23, lx. 14, to the true Israel of God and the genuine "Zion," should be fulfilled in the beloved and true Church of Christ; partly in typical prelude, as in 1 Cor. xiv. 25 (knowing and confessing that the Lord is in truth among *this* people); but still more effectually in the times of final decision, when not merely some among them, but all of the congregation of Satan who are still susceptible of knowledge, shall give the truth its honour, and say, "This is the Church, and here is the Lord!" Obviously, the "*worshipping* at *thy* feet" refers to the Lord Himself in His despised people, who have now, as the antitype of Eliakim, Is. xxii., received the place of honour; thus the additional clause obviates all misconception — they shall know that *I* have loved thee! (Compare Is. xliii. 4.) They had before bitterly contested this against the Lord's people, but they shall be ashamed; and, humbling themselves, they shall confess that the Lord did love them, and moreover

[1] The Apocalypse, so frequently condemned as Jewish, nowhere speaks expressly of Israel's restoration and final place of honour: only in ch. xx. 9 is there even a hidden allusion to it. Here in ch. iii. 9 there is certainly no allusion to the conversion of the Jews, and missions to that people.

"shall know that *I* am He on whose love everything depends."[1] Thus, the greatest honour is put upon Philadelphia; and in this love of the Lord, a return to that first love from which Ephesus fell, is presupposed in gracious confidence. She is therefore not merely a *penultimate* church, which would yet once more give way to apostasy; but (as ver. 10 continues) a community kept to the end, which the coming Lord will find by the side of Laodicea. This was what we had in view when we said that Philadelphia is the pure and genuine,[2] *united-evangelical* church, collected around the true and defended word, in living unity.

BECAUSE THOU HAST KEPT THE WORD OF MY PATIENCE, I ALSO WILL KEEP THEE FROM THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION, WHICH SHALL COME UPON ALL THE WORLD, TO TRY THEM THAT DWELL UPON THE EARTH. As the Lord loves all men with the love of seeking mercy, while He loves only those who love Him with the love of complacency (John xiv. 21, xvi. 27), so He will and can *keep* those only who keep His word. That church which remains faithful to the last, even in the final great temptation, remains finally before Him as kept and *approved*. If He says, The word of *My patience*, He does not mean merely, as Zinzendorf says, "the point of My sufferings," or what the Scripture terms "the word of the cross." This last is indeed at the foundation—so that it certainly does not mean, as has been most flatly expounded, "My commandment to be patient!" St John, in ch. i. 9, points us to the true sense, which Ebrard well exhibits: "The word of Christ, so far as, being the word concerning the cross, it is not a word of triumph, but of patience and waiting, of believing and hoping." Philadelphia held to this word, "as the *whole* word of God, to its awakening part as well as its simply dogmatic." This makes (in the faith and *patience* of the saints, ch. xiv. 12, xiii. 10) of the pure doctrines of faith a matter of practice, in which

[1] So v. Gerlach beautifully says, expressing more, perhaps, than he understood in his own words. Oh that many who think that all depends on this, or that, or the other, would remember it!

[2] "Philadelphia exhibits to us the church in which the first brotherly love begins to burn in many hearts; in which *Christians* out of many *confessions* approximate, assembling round the word of the cross as a common standard, and abounding together in works of love." (Sander.)

patience, as the work of works, approves itself perfect unto the end. Jas. i. 4. That *end* is brought very near in this penultimate Epistle, while the great hour of temptation, which will precede it, is made prominent. As it regards the immediate historical meaning for the typical Philadelphia, this might refer to the impending severe persecution under Domitian or Trajan; but the prophetic meaning shines very clearly through these words to our view. That we may not limit the "whole earth," according to the phraseology of that time, to the Roman Empire (Luke ii. 1; Acts xi. 28), a well-known expression is added from the ancient prophets, with reference to the comprehensive prediction of the end,—"All that dwell upon earth." St Paul, 2 Thess. ii., prophesies of the antichristian apostasy as of a power of delusion; the Lord gave the same intimation, Matt. xxiv. 21–24; and further particulars, though still obscurely, are given in the Revelation, ch. xvii. 12, with allusion to Dan. vii. 24. This *hour* of temptation will correspond to that "hour" of temptation through the power of darkness which fell upon the Forerunner Himself. He that shall be found in watchfulness and prayer keeping His word, will enjoy the protection here promised, and will conquer in the Lord's strength, though he also must enter into the great temptation or trial. That our commonly called Lutherans, or even Reformed, have not been all trained to such warfare and victory, many a prelude has shown. In multitudes will they go over to Antichrist; while only the Philadelphians, with those saved at the last hour out of Laodicea, will hear the voice of Him who standeth at the door, and become the guests of the kingdom that shall be set up after the conflict at the resurrection of the dead.

Concerning *this* catastrophe of judicial decision, this intermediate coming for the setting up of the kingdom, the gracious and all-comprehending exhortation speaks to every one who is numbered among those "who have"—I COME QUICKLY! HOLD FAST THAT THOU HAST, THAT NO MAN TAKE THY CROWN![1] This is, as it hangs on the promise of ver. 10, rather a word of consolation than a threatening; yet it is also an exhortation, the only one of which Philadelphia stood in need.

[1] The "Behold," prefixed to these words, we have already shown to be spurious.

As an exhortation, it is remarkably like that to the faithful in Thyatira, ch. ii. 25; it speaks of no other crown than the crown of life (ch. ii. 10) for *all* who shall be finally found confirmed and approved. Before the end no man is crowned; although from the beginning, and throughout all the conflict, the crown is held out and exhibited as a reserved treasure. What then must the church of Philadelphia hold fast? That which she has! But what has she? Not yet the crown. What then? Her little strength with the Lord's great help, the word of His patience and her persevering continuance therein. From this we may gather how incorrect is that application (so common in our sermons on the Reformation) of *this* saying, which makes Philadelphia the Reformed Church in opposition to antichristian Rome; as if by the "crown" was to be understood the "glory" or "especial treasure" of the evangelical, or Lutheran Church, as such. The original speaks with quite another meaning of quite another crown for quite different persons: it says rather—Hold fast thy standing in grace with persevering fidelity, that no man may *receive* at the last thy crown of victory; that is, instead of thyself. Zinzendorf's pointed note hits the sense here—"As the place was to be taken from the first church!"

HIM THAT OVERCOMETH WILL I MAKE A PILLAR IN THE TEMPLE OF MY GOD, AND HE SHALL GO NO MORE OUT: AND I WILL WRITE UPON HIM THE NAME OF MY GOD, AND THE NAME OF THE CITY OF MY GOD, WHICH IS NEW JERUSALEM, WHICH COMETH DOWN OUT OF HEAVEN FROM MY GOD: AND I WILL WRITE UPON HIM MY NEW NAME. HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES. This promise once more rises higher than the preceding, and opens up the vision of the firm and glorious foundation of the city of God, when all things are made new. Four times "My God," in solemn and stately fulness—uttered by the heavenly Son of Man and Son of God! Nevertheless, in this lofty and sublime glance forward to the last things, there is at the same time a backward allusion—for, heavenly wisdom would exercise us, as the Epistles have shown, in the art of discerning the shadowings of the last things in the first, throughout the histories and narratives of Scripture—to the records of David's house concerning Shebna and Eliakim (already presented to notice in ver. 7), where from afar the *old* and *new*

Jerusalem, or Israel, are very strikingly pretypified in historical miniature.[1] The first reference to this is the expression, so intensified in the original, "shall go no more out"[2]—that is, shall not be displaced and cast out as Shebna was there. And assuredly also—Shall not be broken off and carried away like the pillars in the old temple, Jer. lii. 17; though the former allusion pleases us better, since in Is. xxii. Shebna was to be cast out as "the shame of his Lord's house," ver. 18, while Eliakim, ver. 23, was to be fastened as a nail in a sure place, upon which the glory of the house should be hung, and was to be a glorious throne to his Father's house. But here the words are loftier: I will make him a *pillar* in the temple of God; which certainly does not mean merely, as Lisco says, that he should remain unchangeably fixed in the worship of the sanctuary, like a shaft which moves not from its place! The Lord speaks here in the same sense as in Gal. ii. 9 apostolical men are called the pillars of the Church; though not here of the Church still in contention, but of the consummate temple of glory. Compare the echo of the passage in Is. lvi. 5; and then reflect what a promise is here given to the faithful possessors of the *little* strength of God! Yea, then shall the weak be, as we read in Zech. xii. 8, like David, and become like firm and stable pillars of the finished building; because all temptation will have been overcome, and all danger of falling done away. The *three* names written upon the pillar, or him that overcometh (in the figure they coincide), correspond to the Triunity, just as in ch. xiii. 6; a remarkable passage, where, in connection with *God*, His *name* (in the Son) and His *tabernacle* (the spiritual building in the Holy Ghost) are mentioned.[3] We now understand, it may be hoped, after all that has preceded, why the perfected, *true*, and eternal Church, the new Jerusalem which will finally come down *out of heaven* (ch. xxi. 2, 3; consequently not a church of temporal manifestation), is opened in the promise to Philadelphia, the only church which is fully acknowledged. We may say—*This* is "Philadelphia;" the unity of love

[1] So I observed in my "Isaiah," without then thinking of the Apocalypse.

[2] Ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι.

[3] According to Meyer's profound exposition in the Bl. für h. Wahrheit, viii. § 307. (Comp. also 1 Cor. vi. 11. The name of Jesus in connection with the Spirit.)

perfect, and superabundantly exceeding that earnest of *first* love which the Pentecostal church exhibited to us. The three names—of God, and His city or tabernacle, and His Son, who speaketh—are essentially One. The name of Him who speaketh closes in solemn confirmation—And *Mine*, the *new* name! (Compare, once more, ch. xiv. 1, xix. 12, xxii. 4.) The new name of glory, of victory, never yet fully revealed, will, when the kingdom of the Cross is past, shine forth in the eternal *City of God* upon all who are built there as pillars. It seems almost a marvellous coincidence, in the Divine providential government, that the historical Philadelphia, to which this promise was symbolically sent, is now called by the Turks "Allah-Schähr," that is, *the city of God.*

AND UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA WRITE: THESE THINGS SAITH THE AMEN, THE FAITHFUL AND TRUE WITNESS, THE BEGINNING (THE ORIGINAL) OF THE CREATION OF GOD. In the final Epistle the title of the Redeemer at once rises to the highest grandeur, for the supreme glory and authentication of *Him who speaketh.* For in Laodicea we find a church which is least of all disposed to hear and receive counsel. The place thus named, in earlier times often laid waste by earthquakes, and utterly ruined since Timur (1402), is now replaced by a Turkish village called "Eskihissar." We find its church mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, Col. ii. 1, iv. 13, 16; and it is to us extremely probable that, in the circle of churches for which the Epistle to the Ephesians was designed as an encyclical letter, Ephesus was the first and Laodicea the last.[1] The designation which the Lord now gives to Himself is no longer a single one, and definitely derived from anything in His earlier manifestation; but in its *meaning* it sums up that entire manifestation, and in a certain sense may be said to refer to the commencement of His words on that occasion—I am the First and the Last. Here we have first—*The Amen*, in which with sublime boldness the "verily" of our Lord's preface to His utterances upon earth—swearing by Himself—is made into a substantive name of His person; at the same time with allusion to a word of the prophet, referring to the *last* time, concerning the finally acknowledged God *Amen*,

[1] This will be found established in my Commentary on the Ephesians, i. S. 8–11.

Is. lxv. 16.[1] This Amen, as the personal independent Truth, is now the true and faithful *Witness:* He being immediately such; while all who before or after Him testify the truth of God are only Himself, who speaks and bears witness through them. This expression, again allusive to Is. lv. 4, is not, as has been inconsiderately said, "derived from Rev. i. 5;" on the contrary, St John takes the greeting at the beginning of his book from the before-received word of the Lord Himself. Because proud Laodicea is wise in her own conceit, and must be sharply rebuked, the Lord Himself confronts her—Is it not I, who speak the truth? Wilt thou contend, and maintain thy cause, against Me? To raise this to the highest pitch, He terms Himself finally the *Beginning* of the creation or creature (all creatures) of God; that is, not indeed the first creation,[2] but rather the *original* and primal ground (*principium creandi*), as in John i. 1–3 and Col. i. 15 (correctly, if not literally after the original—the first-begotten *before* all creatures), is meant. In Prov. viii. 22, 23, the same idea evidently shines out of the midst of the Old Testament. If we compare the still more strictly corresponding passage, Rev. i. 8, where He terms Himself, after the "Yea, *Amen*," the Alpha and Omega,[3] we must observe what He would here say to Laodicea. Since the *Amen* specifically refers to the subsequent confirmation and fulfilment of every promise and every threatening (2 Cor i. 20), and, as Meyer excellently says, is the confirming *end* of all prayers, we have in this word here the title which runs back from the Omega to the Alpha; He is the fulfilling, victoriously self-approving *Last*, as He is the First in and before all creation—but in the midst, between the beginning and the end, He is the faithful Witness, as He openly proclaimed Himself in the days of His flesh. As the Beginning of the creation of God, He *knows* every creature through and through; He knows what is in it, in order that He may bear His sure testimony. To *this* He at once points—

[1] This is the translation of the Hebrew, instead of Luther's weakening phrase.

[2] It is melancholy to read the heretical note of Brandt's Schullehrerbibel: "Jesus reckons Himself with the creation of God"—to explain Col. i. 15! What ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως and πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως properly denote, could be made clear only in a theosophical treatise.

[3] With a dubious additional—The beginning and the end—which is only an explanation.

Who hath the truth to say to thee, and with most supreme right declareth to thee in thy blindness, *I know*—what thou knowest *not!*[1]

I KNOW THY WORKS, THAT THOU ART NEITHER COLD NOR HOT: I WOULD THOU WERT COLD OR HOT. SO THEN BECAUSE THOU ART LUKEWARM, AND NEITHER COLD NOR HOT, I WILL SPUE THEE (LITERALLY, I DESIGN TO SPUE THEE) OUT OF MY MOUTH. This is, verily, a keen word, the most fearfully severe in all the Seven Epistles. No denunciation of judgment elsewhere cuts so sharply and bitterly. Fearful it is to think that there could be at that time a historical Laodicea deserving such a denunciation as this! In this last Epistle the second and third parts, the "I know" and the resulting appeal, pass one into the other. The first disclosure of their lukewarmness is the foundation of a *threatening;* the exhibition of their proud blindness, and the not knowing of ver. 17, introduces a *counsel* to them to receive help; with that connects itself, vers. 19, 20, the *exhortation* which now passes into gracious promise. But even here the rule is preserved, and first comes "thy *works*" —though in Laodicea there were works only of a miserable kind, as it were no-works, so that the Lord says nothing more about them and their wretched negation, but proceeds to the exposure of their inner mind. Nevertheless, in all these Epistles He urges the *works*, which He looks for everywhere!

Neither *cold* nor *warm*—has become in German a proverb, as it was used among the ancients, to describe those miserably negative, characterless people who hold a middle place between two parts of a great alternative. But the German translation—which cannot now be altered—unhappily enfeebles the sense of the original, which gives the contrast more severely, and with more strict truth—*cold* or *hot;* for that fervent burning in *spirit*,[2] in *love*, is meant, the glow of which is as "coals of fire, and a flame of the Lord." Cant. viii. 6. Coldness is not set over against the opposite extreme, "fiery fanaticism" (as has been falsely interpreted); for the coldness which is ours by

[1] Ebrard otherwise: He hath also power to execute His threats! But this Epistle to Laodicea—which is almost entirely a *revelation* of themselves—speaks nothing of threatening and power.

[2] Rom. xii. 11, in the correct reading: ζέοντες—as here ζεστός: comp. Acts xviii. 25.

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nature cannot be absolutely changed into its opposite by the heavenly fire. When now a *sigh of love* bursts from the mouth of the Faithful Witness, who cannot constrain the creature to salvation—Ah, that thou wert *cold* or hot!—He speaks the most simple truth. Positively raging enmity, vehement opposition to His grace, He cannot desire as something better, cannot even relatively or in any manner wish for; but that is not meant, for Saul was not merely cold, but inflamed by another fire, when he persecuted the Lord's people. Be it true that such a Saul was sooner won by the Lord than a respectable neutral Gamaliel, waiting under all the acts of God,—that had its reason not in the enmity of Saul as such, but in other principles which do not involve the question of "hot or cold." The words have their truth in this, that they who have never been touched by the power and love of God, and are still in their first natural condition, are in a state less dangerous, and may more easily be brought to the experience of the truth, than those who have fallen away from experienced grace into a dying and dead indifference. For, as Lisco preaches, "while in natural things transition to heat is easier in a state of lukewarmness than in a state of coldness, it is not so in spiritual things, where the opposite always holds good;" but he improperly reckons decided enmity as a state of coldness. Our readers well understand, without much expounding, the Lord's word, which says fundamentally the same thing concerning His kingdom which we are in the habit of saying concerning our own human affairs: we prefer decided and honest reality to a wavering, indifferent, negative medium. The word, John ix. 41, to the Pharisees—If ye were blind—is something similar, although in a somewhat different relation. We can now observe whither Laodicea's prophetical interpretation points: it is the great residuum of dead Christianity, gathered together at the last time, which has not yet passed over into the camp of the anti-Christendom, enkindled from below, only not yet having become released from all connection with Christ; it is the common secular Christianity which, in its melancholy apathy and self-satisfied blindness, goes on its respectable, easy way;—the wretched caricature of the fervent love of the Philadelphian union, though in some respects hard to be distinguished before the final tests are applied with all their severity. It is a lifeless and impotent combination of

all the world under the name of Christ, with some slight remains of real connection with Him.

The judgment upon this lukewarmness is expressed, the figure of lukewarm water being continued, in a tone as it were of mockery; yet there is some degree of encouragement even in the first sharp word. *Because* thou art lukewarm—is more rigorous than the original: there, it is—But so thou art, *being* thou art; in which the *because* seems to pass over into—*If* thou so remainest! Being *such*, thou art an offence to be *spued out!* In Lev. xviii. 28, xx. 22, the land of Canaan is spoken of as spueing out her inhabitants on account of their abominations, as she had done the Canaanites; but this seemingly more rigorous phrase does not reach the severity of our Lord's word—Spue thee *out of My mouth!* For He, out of whose lips cometh the decision of our salvation or perdition, takes us into His lips first when He *prays* for us that our term of grace may be lengthened out, and then when He *calls* upon us to be saved, and finally when He *acknowledges* His own before the Father. This last applies here pre-eminently, as in ver. 5 such confession of them was spoken of. Thus, if Laodicea continue lukewarm, He will entirely give her up and *deny* her, and no more take her name upon His lips, as Ps. xvi. 4 is threatened to the idolaters. In the original the expression is once more softened; for it is not simply in the Future, "I *will spue* thee," still less a decided "I *will* spue thee"—but a word which may be translated, "It is impending, I have in purpose"—by which the accomplishment of the threat retains its undecided and conditional character.[1]

BECAUSE THOU SAYEST, I AM RICH, AND INCREASED WITH GOODS, AND HAVE NEED OF NOTHING; AND KNOWEST NOT THAT THOU ART WRETCHED, AND MISERABLE, AND POOR, AND BLIND, AND NAKED. The devout reflection which we have seen here—"Thou *speakest* of thy riches; the *speaking* is everything with thee, and nothing else; that is thy Christianity and piety"—is beside the meaning. Speaking is here, according to the Old Testament phraseology, equivalent to thinking, speaking inwardly to self. Thus it is—Thou thinkest, ima-

[1] Bengel in the Gnomon: "The expression is gentler than if it had been ἐμέσω σε. Μέλλω makes it not categorical, but modal." Vulg., also, though wrongly, *Incipiam* te evomere.

ginest that thou art rich in every supply, and knowest it not to be otherwise. It is wrong, again, to expound this glorying of the possession of external riches and fortunate outward circumstances, and the being satisfied with earthly things. So Lisco preaches that "the Laodicean Christian draws a wrong conclusion; flattering himself on account of his externally favourable condition, that he has the approbation of God." Nor does it refer to the imagination that it was inwardly as well with them, as their outward condition was fortunate and enviable. For the Lord never speaks generally of external circumstances in these Epistles, having begun with—I know thy works! The words refer directly to their *internal* condition, else the exact opposition would not be preserved in what follows. Indeed, Laodicea's blind, satiated self-glorying, the beginnings of which were here, is to be found united with glorying in industry, civilisation, science, national progress, and what else; yet it is not so as if the rebuking Lord could mean *only* this, as Meyer thinks: "Thou, secular Laodicea, sayest that thou art already rich by *nature*, through *reason*, *genius*, and *temper of mind*, through the Divine *in man*." For, thus to speak would be to give up all sense of needing Christ, to renounce Him altogether, and to be no longer even *lukewarm*. A mass so corrupted in unbelief would *as such* receive no pastoral Epistle, it would be no longer a church. On the other hand, those who would still be Christians, who think (however much they err) that they have Christ fully and sufficiently, because they certainly have something good remaining in them (which they regard as all good)—these are the people of Laodicea. This something good remaining may take the most specious form in its exhibition—familiarity with His word, and seemingly spiritual talking about it, and co-operation in Philadelphian works; all being done, however, without power and life, on the ground of self-pleasing lukewarmness and emptiness. The threefold expression of the vain-glorying [1] is artificially expounded by Bengel: I have *gold;* have become rich in *garments;* and have need of no *medicine* or salve for my well-being! In any case, this specific reference to the several counsels which follow must be *spiritually* interpreted; but Laodicea did not as yet know enough to be able thus to speak concerning her possessions—I am wanting neither in this nor

in that of the Divine gift and help! The Lord must first annihilate her general and indefinite boast, and reveal further—Behold *this*, and further *that*, thou hast not, or no longer hast! Thus the threefold prating goes on like prating generally, or mere tautology, with expressions growing more and more strong: I am now rich—I have made myself rich, taken good care of myself—finally, obviating all warning of need, I want nothing more! Compare in the New Testament the apostolical irony addressed to the satisfied Corinthians (1 Cor. iv. 8), and in the Old Testament (Hos. xii. 9) the still more similar boast of Ephraim—"I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin."[1] This last is the same which the third clause in our passage expresses—I need no reproof or warning, that anything is wrong in me.

But the Lord begins at once with awful rebuke: Thou who thus speakest canst thus speak only because thou *knowest not* what I know of thee, thy misery in uttermost poverty and blindness! This *self-deception* clings to, or roots itself in, the fact, that Laodicea was not altogether cold. But it does not mean, as we have said, "not hostile, only a negative Christianity." There is something positive in the lukewarmness; and in this consisted their wretchedness and misery, that that minimum of good left was regarded by them, in their blind perverseness, as amply sufficient, and thus turned to their hurt even more than coldness itself. Our translation cannot express the peculiar force of the original:—That even *thou* art *the* wretched and *the* miserable, that is, before all others who make no such boast; thy very boasting makes thee the worst among all the Seven whom I must rebuke and punish! *Wretched* or unhappy in themselves, as near to judgment; therefore *miserable* or *pitiable*, to be commiserated and mourned over. These two come first with the strongest emphasis; then follows a threefold evolution of the pitiable wretchedness—the preparation for the counsel that follows, though not in the same order. *Poor* in true,

[1] The Lord seems evidently to refer to this passage; for the second clause, מָצָאתִי אֹן לִי (I have found my substance) quite corresponds to the πεπλούτηκα, which is the very word used by the Sept., but in the wrong place in its translation. Everywhere throughout the New Testament—where they say the Septuagint is alone used—we find passages like this which go back to the original.

gold-precious riches—*blind* in the self-deception, not knowing their own poverty—*naked*, without shame and consciousness thereof!

And now we ask, whether such a Laodicea can be imagined as existing again at the end of the thousand years' kingdom of peace![1] Indeed, in this kingdom itself there will not be possible any such manner of lukewarmness, if our notion is not "enthusiastically extravagant;" the nations deceived by Satan, under Gog and Magog, are, according to Rev. xx. 8, Ezek. xxxviii. 39, to be sought in the external borders of that kingdom. The Epistles do not stretch forward to this final stage of all. But there will be, under and with the *anti*-Christendom which will be developed, before the entering in of the kingdom, a *quasi*-Christendom to be found; and that is here described. *Laodicea*, in earlier times a *rich* commercial place, had changed its first name *Diospolis* (the city of Jupiter, or God) into the opposite, when the Syrian king Antiochus *Theos* (that is, God) named it after his wife Laodice. This name does not lead, as has been said in despite of the derivation, to "the time when God will judge the peoples (or His people)"—none of these churches is prophetically designated with reference to *time*. But a condition and a constitution is intimated, in which *the people* judges and rules, the multitude has the government and authority. Whether this points formally to a "democratically organised" church establishment in states similarly democratical, cannot be determined; this may be included, with reference to its final form. In general, Meyer's remark is correct—"Periods of revolutions in Church and State;"—the meaning expresses authority from below upwards, and the rule of arms, which is in fact the most appropriate ground and scene of rich, satisfied, lukewarm quasi-Christianity.

I COUNSEL THEE TO BUY OF ME GOLD TRIED IN THE FIRE, THAT THOU MAYEST BE RICH; AND WHITE RAIMENT, THAT THOU MAYEST BE CLOTHED, AND THAT THE SHAME OF THY NAKEDNESS DO NOT APPEAR; AND EYE-SALVE TO ANOINT THINE EYES, THAT THOU MAYEST SEE. There is counsel and help even for Laodicea, if in the last hour Laodicea will receive counsel unto repentance and conversion. But how many will

[1] As Richter's Hausbibel says, with vehement consistency in an erroneous prophetic system.

be willing to receive it, the alone-helping counsel of the true Witness and faithful Shepherd? In His *last* pastoral Epistle He no longer *commands* those who are almost estranged from His voice; He gives only good *counsel*, in which, on the one hand, we cannot fail to perceive something ironical—*If* thou wilt yet hear Me;[1] while, on the other, the words are the faithful, earnest purpose of the love of this great Counsellor. It sounds as another deep sigh—Oh that thou wouldst yet hear Me! And the series which follows is in harmony, as with the irony, so with the convincingness of the loving reproof: it first offers the needed riches, then the needed covering, and finally the knowledge of their need; so that the good counsel must, in fact, be received in the inverse order. "Art thou poor, I can help thee out of thy poverty; thy nakedness I can and will cover, *then* wilt thou attain thy riches; but before all it is necessary that thou shouldst *see* thy poverty and nakedness, that thou mayest look for and stretch out thy hands to receive My help." Hence we observe that the *gold*, in its connection with the garments of righteousness, of a holy life, must not be too specifically interpreted of *faith* (1 Pet. i. 7)—nor of *wisdom*, as coming from the word and revelation of God (Prov. viii. 10–18; Job xxviii. 15–19; Ps. xii. 7), which coincides rather with the seeing eyes—but generally, embracing in one *all* that belongs to it, of the genuine *riches* which will stand the test of the fire of judgment (literally—coming confirmed *out of* the fire).[2] But how can man *buy* gold, which buys all else? And what price must the *poor* give for it? Marvellous buying indeed it is, without gold and without price, as Is. lv. 1 (where too, in ver. 4 the faithful *Witness* is set before us) speaks of it, yet it is a buying at the cost of all *imagined* riches, by the offering up of our entire poverty, and all the pride that clings to it! (Prov. iv. 7, in the original, "at the cost of all thy having.") Fireproof[3] gold and possessions buy *of Me*, the Lord

[1] Even Ebrard discerns a "wonderful touch of sacred irony"—not like many who arbitrarily deny the possibility of irony in the words of Jesus Christ.

[2] As we think, almost with allusion to Ps. lxxii. 15, where, rightly interpreted, the Great King, who liveth ever, will give to the poor genuine gold: comp. Job xxii. 25.

[3] Πεπυρωμένον, as in Zech. xiii. 9, Sept.

says with emphasis; not false treasure from others, from deceitful traders and seducers. The way to obtain it is by the putting on of the garments which hide the shame of our nakedness (Ezek. xvi. 22; Gen. iii. 7), garments which the Lord alone can and will give, and which are at the same time white and glorious. But *before all* there must be the true opening of the eyes, *self-knowledge*, which leads to the knowledge of God (Eph. i. 18). Probably not without some allusion to the history of the blind man, John ix., does the Lord speak here from heaven.[1]

AS MANY AS I LOVE, I REBUKE AND CHASTEN: BE ZEALOUS, THEREFORE, AND REPENT. Here the true and faithful Witness utters a principle which, throughout the whole of Scripture, has been declared to be fundamental in the dealings of God with men. The "reproof" which convinces by word, and reclaims from error (as the Holy Spirit reproves the world, and Jesus has here reproved the Laodiceans), is included certainly in the former of these two words; but this word itself, as connected with the second, means also actual judgments, punishments designed by grace for good, wholesome disciplinary chastisement. This is the fundamental meaning of the old saying, which is found in Job v. 17, 18 (not meant merely as in Ps. xciv. 12); and still more plainly reproduced in the New Testament, Heb. xii. 5, 6, from Prov. iii. 11, 12 (comp. Prov. xiii. 24; Ecclus. xxx. 1). Ebrard explains that "judicial inflictions are not here threatened to the Laodiceans, the fear of which might urge them to repentance; but that the past rebukes and threatenings are, as it were, affectingly *apologised for*, as having proceeded from love." I confess that this is to me too mild and affecting. Can we suppose that for Laodicea alone there was such a gentle apology reserved—as it were, almost retracting the threatening—in a manner so different from that of all the other Epistles? In that case, Laodicea—which heard at the outset the piercing denunciation, I will spue thee of My mouth—would receive no further threatening (which Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis received, however), but only a deprecatory apology.

[1] He uses a peculiar medical word for eye-salve. Κολλούριον or κολλύριον, like κόλλυρις, of uncertain origin; prepared, according to a passage of Galen, from a Phrygian stone.

Was Laodicea to be brought back to rectitude by rebuking words alone; and by such as, commencing with—Thou art *nauseous* to Me! end with—These things I say because I *love thee?* We think that the whole passage, Heb. xii. 7–11, sufficiently determines the meaning of the *chastisement*, of which the saying of Solomon, quoted here as there, speaks.[1] To Laodicea, therefore, the Lord would say: "I must and will strengthen My rebuking word, in order that it may convict and recover thee, with strokes and sharp discipline; for thus do *I* deal (which is prominent in the original)—as ruling in the place of the paternal God—with *all whom I love*,[2] according to that ancient and true word." The word used to denote this love is the more general one; less, here at first, than the intenser love of acknowledgment and complacency.[3] Thus, this conclusion of the *last* pastoral Epistle, which is the severest in its commencement, gives a solution, applicable to all of them, of the gracious design of all the threatenings denounced; but, at the same time, holds out the doom of eternal condemnation—*If thou repent not!* For ver. 19 is not merely connected with the rebukes and counsel which precedes; but—and this must not be overlooked!—still more closely with what follows: I stand before the door, as *Judge* also, as we shall see. The second clause unites itself with the first by the intervening thought—"Thus, by rebukes, punishments, chastisements, wholesome and merciful punishment, I call to thee to *be zealous* and repent!" Luther's "fleissig" is not enough: the Greek word is more than *diligent;* it refers to the burning zeal with which repent-

[1] Although in both cases there is a change in the word. The Epistle to the Hebrews takes the word παιδεύει from Prov. iii. 12 (not the wrong reading, Cod. B. ἐλέγχει), because it designs to bring out specifically the idea of the fatherly παιδεία; the μαστιγοῖ, connected with it, speaks plainly enough of the *rod* so frequent in Solomon's writings. The Lord, speaking to Laodicea, appropriating the saying to Himself in the first person, says, ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω—wherein there is apparently nothing said of stripes, and yet He certainly means the same chastising and disciplinary punishments which save, by wholesome punishment here, from eternal condemnation hereafter, 1 Cor. xi. 32.

[2] Again strengthened by ὅσους ἐάν instead of ὃν γάρ in Solomon.

[3] Solomon has ἀγαπᾷ—instead of that it is here φιλεῖ. Compare, on these synonyms, the "Words of Jesus," John xx. 15–17.

ance must be set upon, and may be translated—Be hot, thou *lukewarm one!*[1]

BEHOLD, I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK: IF ANY MAN HEAR MY VOICE, AND OPEN THE DOOR, I WILL COME IN TO HIM, AND WILL SUP WITH HIM, AND HE WITH ME. Strictly translated it is—I have stood, have been already long standing. Certainly, the first thought which rises out of this word is that of the announcement of the *Judge*, who is ever drawing nearer, and who as graciously as solemnly declares His coming: we have seen that this judgment draws nearer and nearer as the Epistles proceed.[2] Thus announcing Himself, He stood indeed from the beginning *at the door;* but that He now so speaks of it, as He had not yet before spoken,—even that is His last and most direct *knocking*. While in Laodicea "the people think they are *sitting* in judgment, without marking that they stand before the awful judgment-seat"[3]—He announces Himself most faithfully as a *Judge* and *Saviour*, either as each will receive Him. Not merely distributively—"as a Judge to some, as a Saviour to others"[4]—but in both characters to every man. There seems to us to be a plain echo of the words of our Lord, Luke xii. 36–40, when this great alternative is exhibited to the servants. What, then, is the *knocking?* It is, as we have said, the nearest announcement at last of His nearness, with reference to all the announcements which had already preceded. Gossner disturbs the sense by his exposition—"And if thou hearest not the knocking, I will *speak* to thee;" for the *voice*, mentioned at the same time, which should be heard, is this knocking itself; although, thus understood, there is an abundant fulness of meaning wrapped up in this comprehensive kernel-word. We shall not do justice to its exposition, if we wilfully neglect the manifold application which the Spirit provided for in this saying. All His chastising visitations were knockings with His voice; and He will loudly and urgently call Laodicea, while still chastising. Nevertheless, we must distinguish from this the proper *voice* of the *inmost* calling and

[1] Ζήλωσον (Lachm. ζήλευε)—for ζῆλος, *fervor*, comes from ζέω.

[2] Bengel: "As if a good friend should let me know, I am in the village—before the courtyard-door—at the house-door—at the hall-door—on the steps—at the chamber-door."

[3] Zeller, Monatsblatt, 1848, Nr. 9. [4] Zeller, Idem.

exhortation; while, on the other hand, all may be considered as one voice together. Let it be observed that He, who hath the *keys*, stands *without* on account of human freedom; and must seek entrance into His own possession! Alas, He would fain *enter* to the supper, and not come to the judgment! When Pilate asked the question, What is truth? the *Amen* Himself stood before the door of his heart. All His testimonies, all His threatenings and chastisements, are accompanied by the inward voice of the faithful Witness, saying in His love—Behold, it is I, and My heart is full of love; open then to Me! But, only few have ever heard the voice as it would be heard—very few in Laodicea. This is found in the turn of expression—IF ANY MAN, in the same significant meaning as John xiv. 23 (the original, *If any man* loveth Me); and thus the distinction is made between believers and the world, comp. John viii. 51. To the *right* hearing belongs, and from it follows, the *opening* of the door, as obedience meeting the call and the knocking—Open unto me! Gossner is once more much mistaken, when he says —"He will make it easier still, and Himself open!" O no, *that* He cannot do; else why should He stand without? The expression of Acts xvi. 14, which has also its true sense, is not to be understood as abolishing that first self-decision of men which the Lord here expressly makes the *condition* of His entering.

And now it is time, after having considered the general meaning of this wonderful word, to look into the gracious depth which the second part of it opens up to us, below its judicial announcement. He that heareth the graciously correcting voice of the Saviour-Judge, summoning to repentance; he that voluntarily opens the door of the heart, before the door of judgment is broken in—with him will He *hold the supper!* The most direct reference to the great marriage-supper (ch. xix. 7, 9) is interwoven with the secret, blessed fore-festival which is appointed and prepared for His disciples in all time:—in order that we might have a word here, which the Spirit may preach to the churches of every age. As the knocking of the Judge is combined in one with the knocking of the friend of the Beloved (Cant. v. 2)—so the final feast of victory and joy is combined with the "internal supper," as this is its type, and earnest and foretaste. Although the German "*das* Abendmahl"

—*the* Supper—does not literally correspond to the original,[1] yet the reference of the signification to the *Sacrament* is perfectly correct, for the word is both here and ch. xix. taken from it. All the Communion- and Confirmation-sermons on this text are correct which, leaving out of sight the special prophetic meaning in it, speak of the internal truth of fellowship between those who open the door and their Lord. For, in opposition to the external sacrament, specifically desecrated in Laodicea by the forgetfulness of this truth, the Lord speaks of its internal reality here. How impressively this speaks against the Lutheran exaggeration of an unthinking reception on the part of unbelievers, we have elsewhere expressly shown.[2] We may gather, even from this text, what is true even of the mere external sacrament, as celebrated in fallen Christendom—that there is for all an earnest, repeated, and affectionate knocking at the door of the heart; though He enters only to those who open to Him.

"I will come in to him," He says, "and hold the supper with him, *and he with Me*." Entirely in harmony with the discourses of the Lord in St John; comp. John xiv. 20, xv. 4, vi. 66. Only when a man opens to Him, does He enter in; again, only when He keeps the supper with us, can we keep it with Him; that is, only when He spreads the table, and gives Himself to our participation, do we eat. Not as in Zinzendorf's too confident paraphrase, which loses the true meaning,—"Then will *we* feast together!" That, to speak boldly, the Lord Himself feasts, in the satisfaction of the desire of His love, when He can impart Himself to us, is a sacred truth which cannot well be introduced into this passage.[3] He keeps the feast *with us* as the Host; we with Him as the guests. Finally, we may quote the striking word of Rieger—"What a contrast! On the one hand, he who rejects the Lord being an object of such loathing as to be threatened with being spued out of His mouth; and He who hears the voice of the Lord being made capable of being His companion at His table!"

To Him that overcometh will I grant to sit with

[1] Which uses a verb—I will *sup*, δειπνήσω.

[2] "Words of the Lord Jesus," on John vi. 53.

[3] Thus δειπνήσω here, because required by the wonderful subject;—an unusual expression instead of δεῖπνον ποιήσω.

ME IN MY THRONE, EVEN AS I ALSO OVERCAME, AND AM SET DOWN WITH MY FATHER IN HIS THRONE. The words now reach their highest point; so that the severe rebuke may be superabundantly counterpoised by the most attractive promise. "To sit *with Me*"—thus the words connect themselves with what precedes—"not merely at My table, but on My throne." "The crowns become loftier and more beautiful as the Epistles proceed; this is the highest and grandest of all" (Herder). To the first church Paradise was shown, as the Lord Himself after the victory of His cross entered into it; to the last church the view is opened up even to the throne on which He finally, as it is said, *seated Himself*. This is more than the twelve thrones of the Apostles, Matt. xix. 28. This is the sitting together with Him *upon His throne*—for *every one* that overcometh! He overcame;—this we find echoed so early as ch. v. 5, and it reminds the reader of Scripture of Heb. xii. 2. The conflict of those who overcame as His followers is severest in the last time; therefore the highest crown of victory is expressly exhibited to all in Laodicea who should rouse themselves from their lukewarmness—though it applies, in common with them, to all who overcome. That this sitting with Him upon the throne—according to the relative meaning of the expression, as already shown—does not exclude the worshipping *service* of the perfected servants *before* the throne of God and the Lamb (ch. xxi. 3), is obvious; but there remains, nevertheless, that reigning with Him of which St Paul speaks, 2 Tim. ii. 12, and that participation in His glory of which the Lord Himself speaks, John xvii. 22, 24. The promise of this royal dominion and glory appertains to the sitting at His table, of which He had already spoken, just as in Luke xxii. 29 the appointment of the kingdom is connected with the institution of the sacrament.

HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES. That which the Spirit saith, the Lord Himself saith *from the* throne, as His last directly personal word, ch. xxi. 5–8, will sublimely declare. But, again, even this personal speaking of the Lord, although it retains its distinction, is yet through the Spirit, as that of the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. iii. 18). Let us here at the conclusion once more make this sevenfold cry which, as the sum of all the

Epistles and of each, urges us to remember that all depends on HEARING! On hearing hangs all faith, all repentance, all love, all patience and hope, all approval of the conquerors! Whosoever yet shall incline his ear—though sunk in Laodicean lukewarmness—may yet attain to the sitting with Him in His throne. *Write!* said the Lord, who appeared to John. That which He dictated, the Spirit of His mouth now *saith;* and we hear—"Blessed is he that readeth, and those that *hear* the words of the prophecy" (ch. i. 3). That which is said applies to the *churches*, to all generally in all places and in all times, as they are signified by these Seven—to each in particular that which is its own, and to all, all in common—consequently, also, to every individual who hath an ear, and will open it. The *Spirit* who writes and speaks is not the spirit of John—although He used the instrumentality of John's ear and hand—but really and truly the Spirit of prophecy as the testimony of Jesus. (Ch. xix. 10.) This is approved and certified to every opened *ear* of all who are sincere and willing to understand:—by the sublime utterance which contains sayings the simple might of which is as gloriously convincing as the great "Let there be light! and there was light!" at the beginning of the Book of God, the Book of books; by the heart-disclosing, conscience-piercing power of the exhorting word; by its wonderful typical and symbolical language, laying hold of the entire ancient Scripture, glorifying the old in every case anew, profoundly connecting every individual detail with the great whole; by its paradoxes themselves, which are an offence only to ignorance, and are interwoven for the purpose of repelling blind presumption; finally, by the remarkable prophetic significance of the historical and geographical names of places, before provided for in the Divine government. Thus the Seven Epistles, with their "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!" are placed first, as an introduction to the entire, still more mysterious Book. And with this Book itself—though many dark places may remain unillumined—every one will be more at ease, in proportion as he understands and lays to heart those Epistles which preface it.

XI.

I WILL SHOW THEE!

(Rev. iv. 1.)

That this "first" voice is the voice of the Lord Himself, and not of an angel, we have already considered, and, as far as *we* may understand, established. He who speaks now is not the angel who in ch. i. first announced the manifestation of the Son of Man; nor he who was generally the instrument of communicating the whole Revelation of St John, and of whom we read in the superscription, ch. i. 1:—as it respects this latter, it has even been very questionable what it means. This expression, which does not occur again till the conclusion, ch. xxii. 6, does not by any means designate the various angels who come forward in this book of visions; for that would be a very strange manner of speech.[1] But it might be, as it were, the "body-angel" of Jesus Christ, whom He specifically terms "*His* angel;" Gabriel (probably since the Annunciation the guardian angel of the holy child) most naturally having the prerogative of this relation. Even this supposition, which we do not absolutely reject, admits the further question, whether all, even the personal manifestation, ch. i. 13, must be regarded as presented through this angel, which to *us* is by no means clear; or, whether the business of the angel commences here in ch. iv., where the *showing* begins (comp. ch. xxii. 6). Of the two we should prefer the latter; which, however, must be consistent with ch. iv. 1, where the Lord says—I will show thee, through Mine angel. But there remains another solution, which, with all becoming diffidence in such a matter, we should prefer to any. When we read in Acts xii. 15 that the believers said to Rhoda, who persisted that it was Peter himself whose voice she knew, *It is his angel*, the connection necessarily leads us to that meaning of the word to which Meyer devoted a separate essay.[2] The word, namely, may signify generally, without involving the specific

[1] Grotius: modo per hunc, modo per illum angelum!

[2] In the *Bibeldeutungen* (Frankf. 1812)—a work still well worth reading.

personality of one sent as distinct from the sender, a sending, message, intimation;[1] and the Christians who, after praying for Peter's bodily deliverance, were strangely unable to believe that it was he, declare what Rhoda heard to be a spiritual manifestation, similarly to Luke xxiv. 37,—whether Peter's "genius," so to speak, was thought of as identical with himself, or, more simply, his *spirit* was equivalent to his "announcement, or token"—as the common people say concerning a supposed apparition of the dead. Suffice that this gives us a phrase which I think applicable here in the Apocalypse: His *appearance*—"the raying forth of His personality," which is not itself another person, but yet not Christ Himself fully and immediately. Thus we are to understand the revelation which is not only not perceptible to our senses, but not fully intelligible to our spirit here below; it is, however, something much more intimate than when the law was given upon Sinai by the ministration of actual angels (Col. iii. 19). This "by His angel," and "I have sent Mine angel," do *not* coincide with the appearance and speaking of individual angels; it is the foundation upon which this latter rests, the *revelation* itself which proceeds from the person of Jesus.

We thought it necessary to establish this beforehand, in order that it might convey our most distinct protest against the interpretation which would introduce in ch. iv. 1 a personal angel distinct from Christ. We must now carefully consider the short utterance of our Lord, as it is connected with what precedes and what follows.

After this I saw—to be understood simply and literally as meaning, "After hearing and receiving the Seven Epistles dictated to me, concerning which it had been seven times said, Write!" Many assume here, and often between the various visions, an interval dividing them; as if "after this" meant "after a certain time, yet once again." We see no reason for this, but regard all as exhibited at once and in direct succession; otherwise, some intimation would have been given of such intervals. That St John, in order to write down the Epistles at once, lapsed back in the interval to his ordinary consciousness, and then anew (according to ver. 2) passed into trance, we cannot believe, since the seeing and hearing of ver. 1 supposes him to be still "in the spirit." It is not said—And I wrote these

[1] As מַלְאָךְ in its first meaning, and *nuncius* in Latin.

Epistles, as was said to me, and afterwards saw. The same Spirit who elevated the seer to see, gave him also the power of remembering what he saw, in order afterwards to write it down: this alone is appropriate in itself, and conformable with ch. i. 11. Thus *after this*—that is, after the first manifestation of the Lord had vanished from sight, and only the dictating voice through the Spirit or in the Spirit proceeded—St John *saw* again other things, and at once records it with the prophetic—*Behold* a *door* in heaven opened (was before me, or shown to me). Not "*was* opened"—for he no more saw the opening of the door than he saw the throne set before his eyes.[1] Both were at once present, visible before him. The open door, according to appearance *in* the visible heaven, according to the corresponding reality *in* heaven, is here not altogether the same which Stephen, Acts vii. 55, saw; but it may answer to the opening of heaven to Ezekiel, who records, ch. i. 1—The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. We may profitably refer this to the great truth, that through Christ the heavens were more and more fully opened to us, from the words of John i. 51 up to their full opening in the ascension. But this general interpretation is only the foundation for that specific opening of the heaven which is here spoken of, for beholding in the spirit. St John was in the spirit, ch. i. 10; and then through the manifestation of the Lord was exalted still higher in the spirit; then again he is exalted a step higher (for trance and inspiration have many degrees) by the repeated cry of the first trumpet-voice, in which the Lord here speaks to him:[2]

COME UP HITHER, AND I WILL SHOW THEE THINGS WHICH MUST BE HEREAFTER! This brief word is the majestic and most significant introduction to all that follows. What preceded had been shown to him, and had passed, as still upon earth. Now he must, not in body, but in spirit, *go up* to the opened door of heaven; that is, be altogether translated and exalted to the contemplation of heavenly things, the symbols of which, apprehensible by him and the Church, the Lord will show him. In the strength of this word, and at the same time in obedience to it, he immediately rises; so that we read in ver.

[1] Gr. ἔκειτο, as in John ii. 6, xix. 29.

[2] Ch. i. 10–13. The λέγων (Heb. לֵאמֹר) which is added to the φωνή and λαλούσης, marks the new beginning of the abrupt manner of speaking.

2, "And immediately I was *in the spirit*."[1] That is, as we have said, a higher grade; as, for example, in the case of Ezekiel, ch. xi. 1, 5. The Apostle was step by step prepared and purified, by the laying of the right hand upon him after the terror of his mortal nature unto death, by the heart-revealing exhortations and sublime promises of the Epistles, into a perfect capacity for beholding all that follows: this seems far more appropriate than the assumption of an interval of ordinary consciousness, and the writing of the Epistles. From this time all goes on in one connected trance, one scene resolving another, until the new Jerusalem, the new heaven and the new earth. With the exception of one word from the throne, ch. xxi. 5–8, which, as it were, breaks in to interrupt, there is no more personal speaking on the Lord's part; but a SHOWING in the manner of symbolical visions down to the last *And He showed* me. Ch. xxii. 1 (compare with this ch. xvii. 3, xxi. 10). But first St John sees the *throne* of the Father and of the Son with the Seven Spirits, of which the last promise, ch. iii. 21, had spoken: now without a veil, corresponding with the mercy-seat in the earthly temple. Come up *hither*—saith He who dwelleth and is enthroned in heaven—who by *His* ascending first changed the closed and distant "there" of the children of men into "*here*," who in His humiliation Himself knew not the time and hour of all those things which now He can and will show as the Lord "to His servants." I will, I shall *show* thee! This word in *this* place, embracing the whole revelation, is altogether appropriate only to Christ Himself. In due time particular angels may show what was particularly committed to them; but now He summons His servant upwards with the promise. "What shall be hereafter"—this connects itself with the first words in ch. i. 19. *Hereafter*, or literally, *after this*, proceeds from the then present time, and teaches us that the visions thus referred to, refer not merely to far distant times, but that their fulfilment embraces all time from the then present. It gives us the right interpretation of the prophetic formula "shortly," ch. i. 1 and ch. xxii. 6. In those first words, ch. i. 19, *The things that are* came first. This is

[1] Lachmann without reason removes μετὰ ταῦτα from ver. 1, carrying it on to ver. 2; but Tischendorf does not follow him, though he also reads Εὐθέως without καί.

wanting here, because it is self-understood in "I will show thee;" for (according to the meaning which we there established) the future has its foundation in the present. That which shall and *must* take place upon earth, in the evolution of time, proceeds only from that which, as a higher reality, is already present in heaven, and can be shown. Above is already fore-typified all that the future will unfold to us; as the idea of the world and its history was present in God before the foundation of the world. So far as we are carried up thither, through the revelation and the showing which removes the veil and reveals the events, so far we know the future reserved from human eye. To ascend into heaven, is in its nature to prophesy for earth.

Let us read and learn, so shall we also see and hear; then will to us also the heavens be opened, and thereby "all things in the invisible world will be shown as present, living, moving action — as far as it belongs to the collective revelation of the Lord Jesus in glory" (as Rieger profoundly and truly expresses himself). If we open the door of our hearts to the Lord Jesus, as the last Epistle requires, at the close, He will open the door of heaven to each of us according to his capacity and need, and according to the measure of his gift; so that we shall in the general, if not with the specific understanding of him to whom it was shown in Patmos, behold and understand the conflict and victory of the kingdom of God in Christ, and what shall be from this time to the end. Thus the Lord's word gives free permission to the desire of us all to look into His great futurity.

XII.

FINAL WORD FROM THE THRONE.

(Rev. xxi. 5–8.)

In the introduction we explained generally why we single out this word as the immediate saying of the Lord Jesus from heaven, in contradistinction from all else that St John had seen and heard. Our remarks upon ch. iv. 1 have made it, we hope, still plainer; and now our final exposition of the last word will remove any remaining obscurity.

I *will show thee* — said the Lord to St John; and He has

shown him all; this book of visions comes to its end. The seer has seen and heard in manifold symbols and voices—with clear and intelligible words intervening, which shine as lights in the prophetic darkness—all that upon which the most gifted and humble exposition can do no more than spell the meaning out, until one day the fulfilment glorifies the prophecy, and God's Book will be read clearly from the end of it backwards. There has been shown to the seer the future already present before God, the heavenly and the earthly—the Upper, with its mysteries and powers for the Lower, with its gratulations of victory and plagues of wrath; the powers out of the abyss, the great conflict, and the glorious victory. He has seen the Throne with its living creatures and elders—the Lamb in His glory—the blessed with their palms and harps—the seven seals with their judgments before the great day of wrath—the seven trumpets with their plagues and woes—the two witnesses—the temple in heaven—the woman in the wilderness—the might of the dragon in the beast—the angel with the everlasting Gospel—the patience of the saints, and the smoke of torment—the last vials of wrath below, in apposition with the song on the crystal sea above—the great whore on her beast—Babylon's fall and the marriage of the Lamb—the victory and binding of Satan, and the kingdom of the first resurrection—the final insurrection afterwards, and the last judgment—the *new Jerusalem* in the new world. All has hitherto proceeded upwards in gradation; but now He that sitteth upon the throne speaks above all the angels, and above all other voices that had proceeded from Him, a glorious word. Then, with a description more full and complete of the new Jerusalem, and the concluding sayings of the Spirit, the whole book is brought to a close.

Stephen *saw* the Lord upon the throne; but at that crisis any word would have been inappropriate. St John, at the corresponding end, hears the *voice* from the throne, after he has seen and heard much that was great and full of the final glory, ch. xxi. 1–4. The new heaven inclines to the new earth; the heavenly-earthly new Jerusalem is the bond of connection.[1] The upper congregation, which already keeps the marriage-feast, begins the government for the healing of the nations who had not fallen in the judgment. Now, more clearly than to

[1] As in Matt. v. 34, 35, the symbolical city stands thus intermediately.

Ezekiel, is shown to him the city *without* a temple, with the name, Here is the Lord with His people! (Ezek. xlviii. 35). The blessedness of its inhabitants the voice to John could only negatively describe: There is no more death, and no more sorrow! That indeed was the first; the overcomers have all come out of much tribulation, as the Lamb, the Captain of their salvation, came out of blood and death. But the former things are passed away; the last and the *new* is come. So the seer beholds it; and thus does the Lord speak of it.

And He that sate (or sits) upon the throne said, BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW! Here the "loud voice from heaven"[1] is followed and surpassed by a word from the *Sitter upon the throne* Himself (ch. xx. 11)—which we may justly claim as a word of the Lord Jesus, the *Son* of God. Many, indeed, think that here (for the first and only time!) God the Father speaks, and they refer to ch. iv. 2, 9, 10, v. 1, 7, 13. There, certainly, to St John was shown—after the example of Daniel—the eternal Father as personally sitting upon the throne, to Whom the incarnate Son, the Lamb, was brought; but since even there (ch. v. 13) all creatures gave like adoration to Him that sate upon the throne *and to the Lamb*, there can be no more a distinction of the Father's person when in subsequent visions the *throne* is concerned. The perfected assumption of the Lamb to conjoint sitting thereupon recurs soon, in ch. vii. 10, 11; where, down to ver. 17, the "Lamb in the midst of the throne" is interwoven with all worship on our part, and with all the promised acts of God towards us. And so we must understand the throne of light in ch. xx. 11, from which the *judgment* goes forth; for the Father hath committed all judgment to the Son (John v. 22, 27). The Lord, even in His humiliation, had spoken of this, Matt. xxv.—Then will the Son of Man sit upon the throne of His glory! and how could St John behold any other vision than that? Similarly, in conclusion, we read, ch. xxii. 1, 3, of the throne of God and the Lamb; and when the "seeing of His face" is spoken of, we know full well that the Son is the Face and Visible Image of the Father. And to suppose that, in this intermediate ch. xxi. 5, He that *speaketh*

[1] According to a reading now accepted; to which, however, we would prefer another: From the throne; literally, *out of* the throne, as is meant in ch. vi. 6, xix. 5, xvi. 1.

is not the Son, is to contradict the fundamental tone of this whole revelation. It is without doubt He whom St John elsewhere calls the eternal *Word* with God—who terms Himself at the end of the book, ch. xxii. 13, once more "the Alpha and the Omega," just as here, ver. 6, from the throne;—so that the beginning too, ch. i. 8, must be understood accordingly. That for the rest, when Christ speaks, it is *God* in Christ who speaks, God through Christ, is perfectly self-understood.

And how runs the first word of the last saying from the throne? With the simplest expression which human language could furnish for the most sublime and comprehensive of all thoughts—with a BEHOLD, which points to the *seen* new heaven and new earth, a Behold which surpasses all the many "beholds" of this book and of the whole of Scripture—*I make all things new!* and in the original, in this expressive, untranslateable order: NEW—ALL THINGS—MAKE I! Not only the city which thou beholdest: heaven also, and earth, *all things* new! This is immeasurably more than the early and distant prelude in Is. xliii. 18, 19, when the New Testament economy generally was comprehended in one antithesis to the previous typical dispensation;—although even there the end (new heavens and new earth, Is. lxv. 17) was included in that glance forward from the beginning, just as here the last words from the throne concerning the end, looking back, embraced also the beginnings.[1] The new creation in the individual regenerate, 2 Cor. v. 17, is the fundamental beginning, and is the slow continuation which wins the victory; for a human heart is harder to change than the heavens and earth. When the whole company of the saved, the collective "bride" (previously, ver. 2), hath been *made ready* with her adornments, then is all this work of preparation complete—then will one mighty word of her Husband be sufficient to make heaven and earth new.

But those who would gather from this isolated "*all things* new" the so-called restitution of all things, the final salvation of all, even of the devil and his angels, the conversion even of hell

[1] Only in the apocryphal words of the book of Wisdom, ch. vii. 27, do we find an approximation to this expression: The everlasting Wisdom, who can do all things, the brightness of the everlasting light, *maketh all things new*, τὰ πάντα καινίζει—but the idea is there very wavering, and indistinctly conceived.

into a heaven of the glory of God—a doctrine contradicted by the whole of Scripture—have no ground *here* to rest upon; for very soon, in ver. 8, we hear the fearfully protesting word concerning the lake of brimstone and fire, the second death, as actually the conclusion of all. As in Eph. i. 23 we read only "all *in all*" (not *in all things*), that is, in all the members of the body—and 1 Cor. xv. 28 must be understood in the same way—so here we find it not written, "*all creatures* new," or "all things *saved*." The new-created all things refer not to the universe[1]—as if nothing would remain unglorified; for in ver. 8, and again ver. 27, and further, ch. xxii. 15, there is a fearful *without*, beyond the limits of the new world and the city of God. There will be no more death—in the new Jerusalem. There will be no more sea—as sea upon the new earth. On the other hand, in the abyss there is and will ever be the second death. We might indeed say, if this also must be added to the "all things," that in a certain sense the lake of damnation is a final and *new* revelation and confirmation of eternal righteousness and judgment; but we prefer the undisturbed reference of the expression to the new revelations of glory.

Hereupon, once more, *And He saith* (*unto me*)—then, again, *And He said unto me.* Is all this the one continuous word of the Lord from the throne, as many understand? If so, why the repetition?[2] We are convinced, rather, that another voice speaks in the interim; and only in ver. 6 the Lord's own word continues.[3] The intervening angel it is who once more, for the *third time*, adds, *Write!* as this voice occurred before in ch. xix. 9, in opposition to Write *not!* ch. x. 4. Thus, with a designed distinction, the high word from the throne is made prominent; for the *Amen*, who here sitteth on the throne, it would have been *here* unbefitting to declare again the truth and certainty of His words. The assurance, *These words are faithful and true* (*Gr.*, true and to be relied on), recurs in ch. xxii. 6, and had its more simple prelude in ch. xix. 9. To our feeling, at least, however appropriate as the exclamation of the angel, it is not in harmony with the throne-style of Him who

[1] Πάντα, not τὰ πάντα, as the book of Wisdom incorrectly writes.

[2] For, to refer it to the Trinity is altogether too far-fetched.

[3] The λέγει intervening is distinguished from the repetition of the first καὶ εἶπεν.

here at once follows the short and sublime word which we have heard by one still shorter and equally sublime.

IT IS DONE![1] Let us not frigidly paraphrase it, as exposition—It is done as certainly as if it had already come to pass! This is not enough, and does not reach the presentation of the future before the Eternal who here speaks, and at once continues—I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE END. Once before, at the seventh vial of wrath, a voice had said, It is done! (ch. xvi. 17). That was spoken of the fall of Babylon and the judgment of God: Concerning what does the Lord here use the same word? Manifestly concerning the completion of redemption and salvation, the new creation unto glory, as the third and greatest *It is finished*, which points back to the Finished upon the cross, and through that to the finishing of the first creation. Between the Alpha and Omega lies all the successively evolved and yet united alphabet of all letters, in all the tongues of the words and works of God; that is, the whole development of history, written in the sevenfold sealed book of ch. v. By the Son was in the beginning the creation, in the middle the redemption, and at the end will be the glorification, of the redeemed; through Him and in Him all history is *accomplished*, for the solution of the mysteries of which He alone is the key.

And now once more—what a combination!—His all-embracing word and testimony goes back from that which is last to that which was first; that is, to the first beginning of the new creation in every one who *thirsts* for salvation. The I, twice in the original made prominent—*I* am, *I* will give—is certainly no other than the I of the Son who thus speaks throughout this book. I WILL GIVE UNTO HIM THAT IS ATHIRST OF THE FOUNTAIN OF THE WATER OF LIFE FREELY. The things which are here spoken together, are spoken separately in ch. xxii. 13, 17; for this book abounds in the repetition of great fundamental testimonies. In ch. vii. 17 we read of living fountains of *life* (which are now united in one fountain and stream, as in ch. xxii. 1);—there following the prophetic word, Is. xlix.

[1] We hold to this reading, and cannot reconcile ourselves to the γέγοναν, which probably came from the incorrect γέγονα. "These words *are* already accomplished, as good as fulfilled," would be a most inappropriate continuation, on the part of our Lord, of the angel's word.

10, yet adding the interpretation "of life," with allusion to John iv. 14, we shall avoid any useless attempt to disturb the "figure" (as it is termed) by so-called explanation. He to whom, as athirst, his thirst itself does not expound it, will not understand it even only in the beginning; he to whom the fulfilment does not bring it at the end, will never understand this giving to drink with eternal life, for here to understand is to experience. Thus much, however, we may say for the exposition of the connection: Although the promising word from the throne promises the last, full refreshment of those who have conquered in the conflict, it yet connects this proffered reward with the first decisive beginning of thirsting, as an indispensable condition. With the thirsting the giving begins and goes on increasingly, as the thirsting is the living impulse throughout the whole conflict, becoming more and more internally vehement in its ardour for the crown of victory. But all, it must be carefully observed, is, though not without our desiring and receiving, yet the *free gift* of the Lord, His pure grace without any merit of ours! To him that *is athirst*—that looks forward from the very beginning to the utmost end. He that *overcometh*—that looks back from the end to the beginning; which simple remark of itself overturns the strange opinion of some expositors, that in the following ver. 7 God the Father begins anew to speak of Christ, the Overcomer for us all!

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son. Here once more, and the only time since the Seven Epistles, is this stimulating, attracting, and more elevated *He that overcometh!* (In the middle of the book, ch. xii. 11, we have once mention of those who have overcome.) And this similar phraseology shows most certainly that Christ is speaking here, although the promise afterwards strikingly runs—He shall be My (literally, to Me a) son. We shall see and understand why this is said, here at the end of Revelation, where the co-enthroned Son, delivering up all to the Father (1 Cor. xv. 24)—giving back Himself and His kingdom won, as it were His inheritance, absolutely to God—on that very account speaks as God sitting upon the throne, while He nevertheless remains the Son, the Lamb in the midst of the throne.[1] He Himself, who first overcame, speaks thus

[1] On ch. v. 6, 7, Meyer says, correctly, as to its deep meaning: "Here we see a double angel, that is, manifestation of the Son. He sitteth upon

here in the name of the Father (who for ever speaks only through Him) of the *inheriting*, which in the Old-Testament type was used mostly of the people as a whole, though sometimes, in anticipation of its final fulfilment, it was used (*e. g.* Ps. xxxvii. 9, 11, comp. Matt. v. 5), as here, of the individuals. The translation—He shall inherit *all things*—is not wrong, though springing from an incorrect reading. The right reading says—He shall inherit *this*, these things; that is, all the blessedness and glory of the city that was shown, the water of life from the inexhaustible fountain of My eternal being communicated to him, the new world (Rom. iv. 13)—the new-created *all things*. Consequently, the translation may be clearly expressed by both—*all these things*.

I will be *his God*—this goes back once more to the first great promise of the typical beginning (Ex. xix. 6, xx. 2; Lev. xxxvii. 27), just as was said in ver. 3. The "God with them" (as it is there, not without signification) is *fulfilled* only in Him who is called *Immanuel* or "God with us." But here we have —in a specific application, the misunderstanding of which has misled the expositors—the prominent promise of 2 Sam. vii. 14, given indeed to Christ, but to Him also as connected with His people; for in the Apocalypse all the lines of all the types and prophecies run together to one great all-comprehending end. If, as the misunderstanding which we have referred to expounds, the overcomer here is Christ alone, of whom the Father (strangely enough, now *after* the overcoming) spoke these words, the quotation would have remained unaltered—I will be to Him a *Father*. But this is not its form here; it is changed in order to show (more plainly than when both were originally interwoven) that *here* the promise to Christ is expressly extended to all His saints, precisely in the sense of the last promise to those who overcome, ch. iii. 21. *That* is the truth which lies at the bottom of the misunderstanding of that exposition: Of every one who overcomes that holds good, which holds good of Me! Thus wonderfully are both interwoven in the fulfilled reality of the typical expression: Christ becomes our *God*, as the Father,

the throne according to His Divinity or glorification; He is the Lamb according to His suffering humanity. The Father is not manifested save through the Son, or by means of the Son, in whom is the ground of all manifestation, and who is the appearance of the Father."

touching His humanity, is *His* God—every one of us becomes Christ's *son*, both according to His Divinity and His humanity, because the second Adam, the Mighty God (*Immanuel—El-gibbor*), becomes, in the consummation of His kingdom of peace, the *Everlasting Father* of all who derive their life from Him.[1]

And now the words suddenly descend from this height of consummated victory, from this brightness of highest glory, to a terrific warning glance at the lost; which may affright all still capable of being affrighted into the desire of yet overcoming. This was necessary to complete the salutary teaching of the grace that disciplines us; however much a perverted habit of thought, or effeminate habit of feeling, may rebel against it.

BUT THE FEARFUL AND UNBELIEVING AND SINNERS, THE ABOMINABLE AND MURDERERS AND WHOREMONGERS, AND SORCERERS AND IDOLATERS AND ALL LIARS, SHALL HAVE THEIR PART IN THE LAKE WHICH BURNETH WITH FIRE AND BRIMSTONE: WHICH IS THE SECOND DEATH.[2] He that overcometh shall *inherit* what is prepared for him by grace; on the other hand, the sinners receive their meet *portion* in strict justice. The words proceed with three times three significant descriptions, not of sinners generally in the world as yet untouched by the Gospel, and therefore not yet ripe for the decision of eternal judgment; but of those same unbelievers, refusers of grace, and apostates, whom the Lord's word at the ascension, Mark xvi. 15, 16, leaves in conclusive damnation, the preaching of the Gospel to them being presupposed. *But he that believeth not*—that is the fundamental note of all, and all else follows only from that. In opposition to the promised eternal inheritance, and testified by the like sure and certain words, there is the dark threatening of the second death:—never literally, indeed, termed in Scripture *eternal death;* yet everywhere, when the same sad mystery is spoken of in other words, most plainly without hope or prospect of any further *second salvation*—so that for the unbelieving (as Harms preaches) "there is not only a great salvation to be lost, but a great damnation threatened."

[1] Is. ix. 6, in its right translation: Wonderful-Counsel; God-Hero (Heb. as in ch. x. 21); Everlasting-Father; Peace-Prince.

[2] We follow here a reading recommended by Griesbach and Scholz—καὶ ἁμαρτωλοῖς—a reading which strikingly brings out the measured arrangement of the clauses, and which we cannot therefore avoid accepting.

Even in this terrific threatening there remains a blessed testimony to the grace which is reserved in the redemption of all prepared for it; for salvation is sure to persevering faith. First comes the *fearful*—all hangs upon this personal fault on the part of the lost. These are obviously not the weak and dispirited, who rather, according to Is. xxxv. 4, 10, shall be comforted; but they are the faint-hearted who throw away their confidence, concerning whom Heb. x. 35–39 speaks, according to the fundamental meaning of another prophetic passage.[1] This first word already contains the rigorous antithesis to the *overcomers;* and it is then explained by the two following words (since the triplets must be taken together throughout the verse): The fearful despair and remain without, because they are *unbelievers;* thus they remain in spite of redemption, becoming again *sinners*, having fallen back entirely into sin after the first beginning of sanctification. Thus ceases the *thirsting* which savingly impels to seek invigoration, and its place is taken by the deceitfulness of sin, which hurries away to disgraceful and abominable transgressions, in many, if not in all, exhibited according to the descriptions which follow. The preceding word, "sinners," is further developed: *abominable*[2] (who work the abomination, ver. 27) means those who sink into unnatural lusts of the flesh, probably the "dogs," ch. xxii. 15, and corresponding to those mentioned in 1 Cor. vi. 9; 1 Tim. i. 10;—*murderers* and *whoremongers* include generally, in addition, all works of hatred and impurity. This second triplet of sins which, more or less foully, yet with equal guilt before the judgment of God, express the wicked spirit disclosed in the first triplet, is followed by a *third* which finally names the transgressions exclusively committed against *God*, as the second referred more especially to sins against the neighbour; and the close returns back to the beginning by a final definition of the *devilish* element into which these wretched souls had fallen. *Sorcerers*[3] and *idolaters*—

[1] Δειλός, *coward*, is used generally of those who fail to stand fast in battle.

[2] Ἐβδελυγμένοι is more specific than the general βδελυκτοί Tit. i. 16. In the Sept. βδέλυγμα occurs for תּוֹעֵבָה Lev. xviii., as also for מְזִמָּה Jer. xi. 15, comp. βδελυκτός, Prov. xvii. 15.

[3] Not specifically poisonous, according to the derivation of the word; but φαρμακοί according to the phraseology of ch. ix. 21, xviii. 23; Gal. v. 20.

together express all apostasy from God, the going into forbidden ways, having recourse to strange and wicked powers; and its profound meaning suggests reference to 1 Sam. xv. 23. In the Apocalypse itself, ch. ix. 20, 21 is connected with this; but also ch. xiii. 15, xvii. 4, xviii. 23. Again, in its profoundest and most universal meaning, St John in his first Epistle, ch. v. 21, enforces the warning against idolatry and idolaters. Finally, there is the strengthening addition—*all liars*, who have fallen into the lie against God's wrath in whatever way, every lie springing from the same principle and leading to the same condemnation. In ch. xxii. 15 it is yet plainer: *who loveth and maketh a lie*, which may be sufficiently explained without many words by simply referring to 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12 and John viii. 44, 45. This is then the comprehensive sum of all: the fearful and unbelievers make God a liar (1 John v. 10, i. 10), and thereby give themselves up (that is, if they so continue, involved and hardened in it to the end) to the devilish lie, which is the alone unpardonable sin of blasphemy against God's truth.

The *lake* or *pool* (wrongly translated by many, *sea*) is here, according to the valid, fundamental meaning of the Greek word,[1] the *residuum* and *caput mortuum*, the remaining ruined residue which is incapable of renewal. By no means is it merely a "sensible figurative representation" of eternal torment, but as physically real as the new Jerusalem. This lake, which has been already three times mentioned, ch. xix. 20 and again ch. xx. 10, 14, 15, comes after the great conflagration in the place of the *sea*, which till then stood in close connection with the depth of the abyss; and it was certainly pretypified by the Dead Sea after Sodom's subversion, although then "fire and brimstone" was only rained down from heaven as a sign, and did not continue to burn. What kind of fire and brimstone (pre-intimated in ch. xiv. 10) it will be we know not, any more than the locality of the lake (ch. xxii. 15, comp. Is. lxvi. 24, called a *Without*); but our presentient exposition should receive what is said of these things, as a description of what is to come by the likeness of things that now are. It is the *Tophet* or *place of burning*, Is. lxvi. 24, xxx. 33; Dan. vii. 11 calls it literally the *burning flame*.

The Lord, in the first section of His teaching upon earth,

[1] Λίμνη, cast out and standing water.

Matt. xxv. 46 (comp. ch. xxvi. 1), placed first *eternal torment*, and closed with *eternal life;* but now the order is inverted, for the stronger warning of His Church: the wisdom of His love knows that it is, and why it is, necessary thus to change. How significantly the Apocalypse, attesting the "wrath of the Lamb" (ch. vi. 16), returns back to the judicial severity of the Old Testament, we have already observed.[1] The Lord speaks of *eternal* torment in the same manner as of *eternal* life; assuredly, therefore, the *second* death can be only *eternal* death, though the word is not expressly used. Elsewhere, as in ch. xiv. 11 (after Is. xxxiv. 10), we read of the endless smoke of torment, as similarly of the undying worm and the fire unquenchable. Many, like Meyer, repose upon the thought, "It is *not* said that it is the *last of all*," and hope that "the fire of Gehenna may finally dry up the pride of the twice dead, and kindle their thirst for the water of life." We cannot see (even if it were lawful to go beyond the letter of Scripture) how that were possible in the "infinite eternities." We bow with fearful awe before the word of the Lord, as we find it written; and could more easily think that from the saints will be taken away, not only all their suffering, but also all sympathy with the lost. (Halleluiah! ch. xix. 1–4.)

Let no one irreverently wonder that the Lord's last word from the throne was—Which is the second *death!* His words of promise, invitation, and encouragement had been abundant —from the word outside Damascus down to the word addressed to Paul's infirmity; and so throughout in this book. Nor is this sad word the actual close of the Apocalypse: it is followed by the description of the glory of God in the heavenly city; and there is once more the great invitation, ch. xxii. 17—Whosoever *will*, let him take the water of *life* freely! "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ with all the saints," is, in ver. 22, the gracious end. But we close our little book, and let every reader close it, with the prayer: Even so, come, Lord Jesus; abide with me and strengthen my faith, that I become not fearful—defend me from sin and shame—cleanse and sanctify me, that I may in lowly adoration abide faithful to Thy truth, that I may overcome and not be hurt of the second death! Amen.

[1] "Words of the Lord Jesus," on Luke ix. 55.

THE EPISTLE OF ST JAMES,

EXPOUNDED IN THIRTY-TWO DISCOURSES.

BY RUDOLF STIER.

PREFACE.

I HAVE been often and importunately asked to print, for more extended use, these Sermons on St James. Having been long unaccustomed to write my discourses beforehand, it was difficult, amid my many engagements, to comply with this request. Nevertheless, an internal impulse prompted me to do my best to contribute my mite towards the better understanding of this little-studied Epistle; Jas. iv. 17 came powerfully to second the request, and induce me to regard it as from the Lord. I have at length accomplished my purpose; and, by the omission of much that was orally expounded and applied in exhortation, and retaining simply the concise fundamental thoughts which conduct the train of exposition, have succeeded, I trust, in presenting the whole in such a form as will suit the *reader*.

This is a plain account of the present little volume, which I now send forth in the full confidence that the Lord will sanc-

tion it with His blessing. Learned readers will not, indeed, find a commentary which searches out the original, but they will find that the whole rests upon careful examination of the text. The practical strain of observation upon this Epistle, which is altogether practical, albeit resting upon theory and doctrine, may serve to supplement some other commentaries, and point out to many of the learned the way which alone will conduct to its adequate exposition. Preachers will easily see how these sketches were or should be expounded in the living address. But readers who *seek edification*—and, where the interpretation of Scripture is concerned, there should be no others —will not, I hope, be uninstructed and unblessed: to all such, these briefer notes may be better and more effectual than ampler dissertation, which is more fitly *heard*.

I.

TRIALS PURE JOY.

(Ch. i. 1–4.)

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it pure joy when ye fall into divers temptations; and know that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her work perfect, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

THE writer of this Epistle does not call himself an *Apostle*, but a *servant* of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ; it is possible that he was, therefore, the Apostle James the Less. But when we find St Jude introducing himself in his Epistle, ver. 17 of which with equal plainness distinguishes him from the Apostles, as a brother of James, we are disposed to regard the supposition as highly probable, that in these two Epistles two of the *brethren of the Lord Jesus* (Matt. xiii. 55) are speaking to us. For many reasons, not here to be discussed, we are convinced that these brethren were literally the children of Mary by Joseph; even as they speak, John vii. 3–5, according to household usage in their mother's house, and invariably appear in company with their mother. That St James does not describe himself as the *brother*, but as the *servant* of the Lord of Glory, with whom is no respect of persons (ch. ii. 1), must appear quite natural to every one. "A servant of God and of His Son:" this is partly an Old-Testament expression; appropriate to the Bishop of Jerusalem, who, for her church's sake, adhered permanently and faithfully, as far as was lawful, to the old law (Acts xxi. 18–20, Gal. i. 19)—James the Just, as he was called. But his Epistle does not preach to us a legal doctrine: it contains the full and profound truth of the Gospel; exhibited, through the wisdom which was from above, in a manner as truly evangelical as that of St Paul, or any other Apostle.

And what is the first thing which he has to say to his readers? He sets out with *faith* in ver. 3; and with reference to its *testing*, that it may approve itself genuine and sound. This is, in a certain sense, the theme of the whole Epistle.

And here we see at once why he precisely thus addresses his readers in the introductory greeting: "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting!" The dispersion of the tribes of Israel is, according to the Spirit's further meaning for future readers of the Bible, a symbolical expression: comp. 1 Pet. i. 1. The *twelve* tribes of Israel according to the flesh were then no longer to be found; but the spiritual Israel is ever to be found in the dispersion of this world, and therefore in *manifold trials*. And, nevertheless, he greets them with *joy to you!* This Greek greeting (χαίρειν, sent also in Acts xv. 23 by St James to the Gentile brethren) receives here a profound and beautiful meaning. Should those who were thus greeted answer, like Tobias—"What joy shall I have, who must sit in darkness, and no more see the light of heaven?"—vers. 2–4 give the answer; and there we have, at the same time, the substance of the whole Epistle: The confirmation of true faith *in works!* But first comes the work of the patience of faith in tribulation.

Wherefore should we count our manifold trials to be pure joy? Because trial is the necessary test of faith, and works the wholesome effect of patience in tribulation.

Faith *requires test.* But how easy is dangerous deception here! Even in earthly faith, knowledge, ability, and possession, the fundamental question comes in—Do I entirely believe this? Do I know this with absolute certainty? Am I assuredly able for this? Is this really mine? and under all circumstances? But here we have to do with that faith by which alone we are saved; with a faith, however, which is so entirely opposed to the evil, unbelieving heart! (Heb. iii. 12). Have I forgiveness? The answer to this is not to be lightly despatched. Have I also power and vigour unto holiness? Do I stand fast, and surely rooted, in the life of regeneration? Does Christ live in me, so that the life which I live in the flesh and in the world I nevertheless live by the faith of the Son of God (Gal. ii. 20)? O how needful is the most earnest testing here! We should of ourselves be urged constantly to apply it, and to this the word of God exhorts us: "Examine your own selves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves!" (2 Cor. xiii. 5). No man is willing in the slightest things to be deceived, and to live in uncertainty: but here no less is involved than our all! The final test will infallibly show whether we have altogether

run in vain, and missed the goal! But that is not all which is to be feared by us, as if it were enough to say—If I only escape damnation at last! No, the right spirit of a loving faith is anxious that the faithful God should have as much honour from us and joy in us His servants as may be possible through His grace; and that we should not bring discredit upon our gracious Lord through unfaithfulness, weakness, or half-heartedness in His service. But we are too much indisposed to this kind of test, and are too much inclined to think of ourselves as Peter thought. As Peter spoke, so speak also all the disciples, and the Lord must mournfully ask—"*Do ye now believe?* The hour cometh that ye shall be scattered, and leave Me alone!" (John xvi. 31, 32). Therefore, the faithful God comes to our help by the wholesome tests of affliction, that He may save us from self-deception.

Faith *receives* this so necessary test only in *trials*. This word has an evil sound as *temptation;* it might seem as if God were not faithful and good in applying such tests, as if He put stumbling-blocks in our way that we might fall. But that troubles should thus become temptation to us, lies *in ourselves* and in our own folly, as St James afterwards takes care to teach. God's part in our trials serves only for the purpose of salutary *testing* of faith, in order that it may be *confirmed.* Alas, as a thousand examples show, not every tribulation worketh patience, yea not every test of an existing faith approves and confirms that faith as real. *If,* however, our faith is not extinguished, but abides, it becomes in this discipline manifest as genuine faith. That is, its *lack* is at once disclosed and supplied; and the *good which is in it* is at once revealed and strengthened. "That ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing!" Alas, in how many things are we all still lacking, though we rightly know it not! Even the right and believing *attention to the word,* which however should be the beginning and foundation of all, is not found in us as it should be before tribulation teaches it (Is. xxviii. 19). We may long fail to know in our inmost souls, without being conscious of the lack, that God alone is true in His promise and in His threatening; when the testing time comes, we may be found wanting, to our own great amazement, even in this. It is, indeed, a melancholy experience, to be constrained to admit that we have no root, when the heat and the storm come suddenly upon us! But

to discover this through tests *before* the last one, and while there is yet time to cast forth deeper roots, must needs be matter of thankfulness and joy. Yea, to be constrained to feel and confess the perilous lack, is itself, if we are sincere with God and our souls, abundant cause for *joy*. Joseph became all that the grace of God designed him to be, only after God's word came to him in his distress, and the word of the Lord did *try him* (Ps. cv. 19). Discerning our need, we seek forgiveness for secret sin and guilt; strength from above for our impotence; and the grace of sincere obedience to counteract the treachery of our own hearts. And he that seeketh findeth! Necessity teaches to *pray;* teaches us not to put our trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead (2 Cor. i. 9); not to look at earthly but at heavenly things; not to rely upon the staff of a broken reed which goes into a man's hand if he lean upon it (Is. xxxvi. 6), but to build upon the sure foundation which is unmoved for ever! And this brings the joy of the only right glorying—"I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all my tribulation" (2 Cor. vii. 4).

And what pure *joy*, to have full demonstration, in the time of tribulation, of the good which the grace of God had implanted in the soul during better days! It is in the darkness that the light arises in all its brightness—like the stars in the night. The Christian may have received from God in the tranquil simplicity of his soul much more than he himself is conscious of; and the treasure of his grace may not be known to himself until the stern inquiry is made which brings it to the light. When the question is then asked, Where is thy faith? how precious to be able to answer by the best demonstration, Blessed Lord, it is here! And even if it should not at once display itself, examination is made, old slumbering experiences revive, the foundation in the inner man shows itself firm; *the gift of God is stirred up*, and the spark is fanned to a flame (2 Tim. i. 6). Is not that *joy?* And this exercise *increases* the strength which is in us. In trials, our faith becomes more pure, better able to rest upon the Word alone, to believe without seeing or feeling—so that we learn to live from faith to faith. *Thus we glory in tribulations:* knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed (Rom. v. 3–5). To glory in tribula-

tion is assuredly the highest degree of the life of faith; thus in the work of *patience* our sanctification is perfected in the supply of all that we lack.

Let us, therefore, count our manifold trials pure joy, *on account of this salutary effect of patience!* But patience must accomplish its perfect work—says St James. That it does in trials—first, as the test and the act of an existing faith; and as the only way to perfection. What is the so-called faith which yet can endure nothing, which cannot abide to be earnestly tested? What faith is that which cannot trust in dark ways, which does not create obedience in hard tasks, and patient continuance in hope towards God? We are partakers of Christ then only when we hold fast the beginning of confidence to the end (Heb. iii. 14). This precious work of patience is the essential and necessary *continuance*, to which alone the kingdom is appointed (Luke xxii. 28, 29)—the acceptance of trials without suffering them to weaken us as temptation; thus all our knowledge enters into our will, all our faith and feeling into our work, and we approve ourselves in all things to be the *servants of God*. For our Master and Forerunner, the Beginner and Finisher of our faith, was thus tested and approved, because for our sake He entered into the servant-form of obedience. Although He was the Son, yet He learned obedience *in that which He suffered*, and thus became perfect as the Captain of our eternal salvation (Heb. v. 8, 9). Thus was it with all believers before He came; so that even Judith could make mention of the manifold temptations of father Abraham, and that he became the friend of God after he had stood many fiery tests; and how Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all in whom God took delight, were called to overcome great tribulations (Judith viii.). It is for ever true that "we have need of patience, that we may do the will of God, and inherit the promise" (Heb. x. 36). But the right *doing* of the Divine will is perfected in the surrender of our will to voluntary *suffering*, in the imitation and fellowship of Christ, and His *cross*. This great word St James does not here mention; but he means precisely the same as St Peter does: "*Rejoice*, inasmuch as ye are *partakers of Christ's* sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. iv. 13).

The work of patience in faith is for us the only way to

perfection:—that we may be finally perfect and complete! *Sanctified* must all be, through faith in Him, who shall receive the *inheritance* (Acts xxvi. 18). Purified through and through from all still adhering and admingled sin! But this can take place only through the opposite of that by which we fell. Pride is the ground and source of our sin—therefore God abases and brings us low! Vain and false pleasure entices and binds us long—therefore God ministers the smart of loss and suffering! Unbelief and disobedience have penetrated our souls far more thoroughly than without test we could ever comprehend—therefore God thus urgently demands faith and obedience! And they who do not withstand His power, grow and thrive under the discipline; because He holds out to prayer and acceptance the very grace which He requires in us. Mark those believers who have passed through many trials, and have retained their faith: what a maturity, wrought out in the heat of tribulation, shows itself in them—how different from those who have not been tempted! Our robes are washed and made white in great tribulation (Rev. vii. 14). In the keen chemistry of patience we are purified from all that is not faith, that is not obedience; we become strong and entire, made whole by such experience and discipline, entire men and entire Christians—*wanting nothing*. Much may be wanting externally; but there is peace and joy, light and strength, in the inner man. Thus glories the Apostle: "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am initiated both to be full and to be hungry (even in the spirit), both to abound and to suffer need. (For, in the midst of this need, this poverty and weakness, strong faith can say—) I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 12, 13). Is it not *joy* to reach that point, or even clearly to discern that we are approaching that goal, and on the way to full perfection? To know, with absolute certainty, I am in the *right way!* in the midst of the *dispersion* of this world? True, that another saying also holds good: "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous" (Heb. xii. 11). How else would it be discipline or trial? It is true that we have not yet *now*, while we are for a season in heaviness through manifold temptations, that joy unspeakable and full of glory with which we shall rejoice at the end of our confirmed faith (1 Pet. i. 5–9). But we

are exhorted to prize the way only as leading to its glorious goal. Trial itself is not joy, but *faith* must and may *esteem* it as joy to be prepared by it for eternal bliss—understanding and embracing the greeting of the Spirit of grace, Joy unto you *beforehand!* The obedience of faith goes gladly in the way which God directs; patience makes diligent and persevering use of all that the faithful God imposes.

Know it, therefore, aright that the trial of your faith worketh patience, and that patience in her perfect work maketh you perfect and entire! Therefore, count not strange the *divers* trials of your life, as if there could be no joy in them for you! *Divers*, indeed, they are, as we all of us experience in due time; the happiest shall find his own especial trouble. Divers tribulations from without and within, of body and of soul, in all the various forms which the wisdom of God may adjust for each. The foolish heart may murmur, and ask—Wherefore is this or that sent to me? Why are, not one misfortune alone, but many of them following each other and intermingled, sent upon my poor spirit? Only direct thy faith to the depths both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, that it may honour His judgments and ways, the individual particulars of which the human mind can never understand! The Good Physician will surely make thee whole, if thou surrenderest thyself to His hands; and to that end He gives thee, out of the boundless dispensary of all things which are at His command, evermore the best remedies for thy disease.

II.

ASKING FOR WISDOM.

(Ch. i. 5–8.)

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men with simplicity, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Were we only such knockers and askers as the gracious exhortation and promise of our Lord Jesus would make us,

then should we more and more receive what is wanting in us—joy in tribulation, patience under trials—and thus stand in the day of judgment with a confirmed and perfect faith. And is it His fault or ours that it is not so with us? The gate of grace is indeed a strait gate, but it is an open one, to which all are invited; and the faithful ear of Him who would have His house full, marks every knock. *Joy unto you!* is the sound with which the rejoicing message of the Gospel greets us. Yea, the gracious *Enter! Enter!* is loudly sounded in our ears before we come and knock. The Father tells us through the Son, Ask, and ye shall receive! And this embassage St James, as the servant of God, extends to all who read and hear his word, in this his *earnest invitation to ask*. Let us observe *who* is invited to ask; *for what, of whom*, and finally *how*, we must ask.

Who, first, is thus invited? Obviously, only he to whom something is lacking which he would fain have and deeply needs. Thus those who are perfect and entire, wanting nothing—St James does not invite to ask and receive. If thou hast no consciousness of sin, then say not—Forgive me! If thou feelest no weakness, then cry not—Strengthen me! If no trouble oppresses thee, how canst thou say—Help me and deliver me! He who *lacks* nothing, has nothing to *ask for*. But such are none of us, beloved! Is there one among us who can, otherwise than in joyful hope, sing, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I *shall* want nothing (while, that is, I continue to take from Him the supplies He gives);" who already, while on earth, sits in the midst of the fulness of heaven; and who, to speak foolishness, has gone beyond the need of the use of the entire Lord's Prayer? Brethren, there is much lacking to us all; and what we receive, how speedily do we lack again! Perfect and entire, holy and unblameable, before Him, are we only in love. Let then the friend come, sent to your care by the great Friend, and you have no supply in your own hand for his necessity. You need one loaf for the guest; one for yourself, that you may eat with him as is fit; and yet one more, that there may be no scantiness, as in spiritual things there should never be. Whence are the three loaves to come? Can you make them by any power of your own? You cannot make to yourself a crumb for your own poor bodily necessity, unless God give

it—and can you provide the bread of life, of love? Empty of this we all are of ourselves: dig it you cannot, therefore be not ashamed to beg it at the door of the Most High, as your highest honour. This might we, and this should we all. But few receive this saying; they deny rather and cloak their bitter need, or else labour in vain to supply their need for themselves. These St James leaves in their darkness, and says—*If* any man among you lack. Sayest thou, That man am I! then hear further *for what* thou art invited to ask.

What we must ask for:—that indeed we first truly *know* in the time of *trial* of which we have heard; ordinarily we are too apt to be satisfied and content. And this is true not only of the children of this world, who, like the rich man, have all external abundance every day; alas! it is true also of *those* Christians who are pointed at by that parable, however unwilling they may be to think so. They think themselves already kings and priests in purple and fine linen; they have reached, as might be thought, a state of perfection. They have so much *faith*, that they cannot speak enough about the excellency of that virtue, and how it is faith that brings everything, and accomplishes everything that concerns the glory of God's grace. Moreover, they have so much *wisdom* that they are masters of Scripture, free from all error, and can be all men's teachers in the knowledge of the truth, as they call all their own opinions. Such people will never be taught otherwise till trials bring them to feel their littleness and poverty. Thus not to them at once, but to all who feel their need, the gracious invitation is given; to all who are so much tried that their deficiency has been proved to their souls; and to all those who are so far simple, sincere, and humble, as to expect tribulation with anxiety, fearing that, if it befell them, they might be found wanting. What are they then to *ask*—now in anticipation, and afterwards when the affliction comes?

Here we are not told to ask for help and salvation, for the turning away of trouble, the removal of the danger. To ask for nothing but that is a dangerous and, strictly considered, unintelligible prayer; although the merciful God imputes it not as sin to our weakness and folly, as our distress drives us instinctively to ask for deliverance. Further, St James does not here tell us that we should pray for patience, for strong faith, for

grace in order to obedience and resignation—although assuredly here lies the fundamental want of our poor souls. Thus to pray would be indeed a most intelligent and excellent supplication, yea, the wisest and best that a sinful man could put up to God:—therefore it is the last which we learn, as crying for mere deliverance is the first. But we do not at once attain to this; therefore St James, taking his stand midway, mentions with striking point this only—If any man among you lacketh *wisdom!* For this is itself wisdom coming down from above, and which, therefore, must first be prayed for, to know that we ought rather to pray—"O God, take not away my trial from me; but give me patience that I may enjoy its salutary and peaceable fruits!" And, further, if I rightly understand that, it is important to understand also *how* in every particular trial patience is perfectly to effect its good work. We must not here take St James' great word—If any man lack *wisdom*, let him ask for it!—in its full and universal meaning (which it indeed includes); for, every word in this profound Epistle has its own significance, and in the third chapter we are exhorted to contemplate and ask for wisdom in all its fulness. But we now adhere to the meaning which the connection imposes upon the word—Wisdom in the trial and for the trial. Yea, it is a good thing also to seek wisdom *in preparation for* future trial; and this refers not merely to this or that tempted "*any man*," but to *every man* among us, since trial impends over us all.

Brethren, we all lack at the beginning, and unless we ask shall always lack, that precious, needful wisdom which knows how to understand, and receive, and use trials aright. First, to *understand* them fundamentally and according to truth:—that trial is not evil in itself, and not evil to us; but that the design of the tribulation of Christians is absolutely good and gracious. That is wisdom, to know whence the trial comes, that is, from the Father of spirits, the Giver of every good gift; to know to what it tends, that is, to salutary discipline, and above all and foremost to self-knowledge, as a defence against the folly of self-deception. He who so understands it, and only he, will *receive* it unto repentance, which the grace accompanying it will work; he will say with docility, under the mighty hand of God, thus disclosing the ground of his heart, "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and Thou makest me to know secret

wisdom" (Ps. li. 6). He who thus receives trial, and only he, will finally *use* it to his sanctification, purity, and perfection. This sincere, humble, diligent use of trial is, in fact, for the children of men, the highest and best of all possible wisdom; and is it not most sadly lacking sometimes among those who are truly wise and prudent? Is it not an exceptional case when we find one who rightly demeans himself under the disciplining hand of God, without any foolish recoil from His chastisement? Therefore so many suffer so many things in vain; and make their heavenly Father's dealings with them harder than His heart would be disposed to make them. The wise Solomon says, "If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct" (Eccles. x. 10). O how many there are who, after all their careful efforts, are forced to discover that they have not had this wisdom in their afflictions—that they have not understood the virtue of quiet patience and urgent prayer! And fearful is it, at the end of a whole life of salutary sufferings, which, however, have failed to bring the soul to salvation, to find that that wisdom has been altogether wanting! But why was it so? Ye have not learned to pray:—and why have ye not? Ye would not rightly know what it was ye lacked! This is the crown of wisdom, not to neglect even to the last to ask and receive; but it is also the beginning of wisdom, when God says, "Ask *what* I shall give thee!" to know what that should be, and with Solomon to ask an obedient heart. And so it ever proceeds, between the beginning and the end; there is the constant need to know *how* to obey, and to suffer, and to use for salvation what God has given. Therefore, if any man lack wisdom, let him *ask!*

And *of whom?* Obviously *of God*, of Him who has all good things for us, of that Lord who is rich unto all who call upon Him (Rom. x. 12). St James terms Him *God who giveth;* and, in the original, it runs as it were with emphasis—The *giving* God! All other givers, at whose hands we may seek anything, received first from Him, and can give only through Him. From men we may ask and receive wisdom, and should not refuse it; but best of all, in all cases, is it to repair at once to the Fountain whence alone the pure stream flows. That is God, who left Himself not without a witness to the Gentiles in

their own ways; who *giveth* to all men life, and breath, and *all things;* who will give to us, who have the word of His grace, *the inheritance*, if we yield up our hearts to the sanctifying influence of all the riches of assured understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God the Father, and Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. ii. 2, 3). All things in Him are already ready for us; we have only to go and take what is ours; and if thy feeble faith ask—Are they even for me? St James says, Who giveth to *every man* or *to all;* for giving is His pleasure, as His Son has told us, *To give is more blessed than to receive* (Acts xx. 35). Think, O evil and unthankful man, whether thou hast not received many good things in thy lifetime even without prayer! Think, thou who mayest have prayed a little, whether He hath not heard and answered thee many times! Thank His Father-name, thou who canst pray in the name of Jesus; glorify the Giver with ever-increasing supplication, that thy joy may be full! He verily will not be weary of giving; for He giveth liberally, or *with simplicity*. Thus to give even we are exhorted by St Paul, as being imitators of God and dear children; and what is his meaning in that place? Let him that hath a ministry, or a teaching, wait on his ministering, and on his teaching; he that is fit to rule, let him rule with diligence (Rom. xii. 7, 8). So he that giveth with simplicity, will simply *give;* it will be a pure, unmingled giving, without any admixture. Indeed, evil men cannot, before grace has fundamentally taught them to understand our Lord's saying, give with simplicity; therefore, although selfishness may be willing to receive from man, pride on the other hand often forbids it to ask, resenting the being placed under an obligation; and we cannot but acknowledge something right in the poor evil man who is ashamed to be a beggar at the gate of the wicked. Men either give gifts which are not good, such as God always gives; or they give them not willingly, without the ready heartiness of love. At men's doors there must be long and frequent knocking, before they are opened; but God Himself invites and entreats us to come, and leaves us nothing to do but to ask for the abundance of His gifts. Men, finally, often give without affection and grace, spoiling and embittering their gifts by a proud and repulsive manner of giving: but God giveth liberally to every man, and *upbraideth not!*

Not that He invalidates the former sin, on account of which thou art not worthy to receive the things which thou askest; but He does not regard and rebuke the defect of distrust or presumption which may adhere to thy prayer; He does not restrain His giving because of the future unthankfulness and perversion of His gifts which He may foresee. When He upbraids, this is the matter of His complaint, that we do not come to receive with as much simplicity as that with which He is ready to give; as He said to David, "I gave thee thus and thus; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given thee such and such things" (2 Sam. xii. 7, 8). Let not him, therefore, that lacketh anything be ashamed before this throne of grace; let him *ask* of this *giving* God! *And it shall be given him!* that is a positive declaration of a most certain thing. Surely we are not all beyond the lack of anything: then let every one consider what is wanting to himself. *Let him ask!* is constantly, graciously, and abundantly said—yet, alas! we ask not. Or, if we ask, we receive not—because we *ask amiss* (Jas. iv. 3). Thus it depends upon something which we have already mentioned, and shall now consider.

How are we to ask? The answer is, We must simply *ask*, and that as *of God*, of that God *who giveth* simply to every man; that is, as St James goes on to say,—But let him ask *in faith!* And nothing more than this? Is this all the mystery of this most important business, the only condition on which it is suspended? Is it not added—In humility? This indeed is self-understood, when we poor sinners really *ask* of the Most High God. Is it not added—With befitting, reverential, rightly-ordered words? No, God does not oppress us with His majesty, He not so much marks the words as the heart, and understands everything, however unskilfully we may frame our request. But should we not add—With earnest vows touching the right use of His gifts, with pledges of a future gratitude? Brethren, if this were requisite, then would no man receive anything from God. Thus, in fact, one thing alone is necessary: "Let him ask *in faith*, in confident expectation, that I will to hear and will give!" That is, indeed, giving with simplicity! O that every one who knows this could thus ask in faith, and *without doubting!* Faith is a certain assurance, in which man does not doubt. What reason is there for doubting? Here is the invitation of

Him who is Truth to every man. His promising word is a pledge and direction which will never fail him who reminds the Lord of His word—*Seek ye My face.* If ye have faith and doubt not—saith our Lord—it shall be done according to your word. *All things* whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive (Matt. xxi. 21, 22); and all those gifts which we already enjoy are so many proofs and pledges of the freeness with which God giveth everything. He giveth like a father—should we not also ask as children? Childlike faith makes not many words, which often spring from a kind of doubt, and would bring something as an equivalent; which, at least, are not simple *asking* for His simple *gift.* Simple, childlike faith in prayer consists not in high devotion and warm feeling; it is nothing but believing and not doubting from the bottom of the heart. But how this is, we, alas! know less by sure experience than by its opposite—the unhappy state of the *doubter.*

Of this St James mournfully speaks, after his word of encouragement. He that doubteth is like a wave of the sea, driven of the wind and tossed. The wind urges the wave from without, and it is urged from within and below by its own ever-restless nature: so the doubting heart, in its distraction between prayer and its own restless thoughts, which will never suffer the *Give me!* to reach the full energy of simple asking. A doubting petitioner offers not to God a steady hand or heart; so that He *cannot* deposit in it His gift:—that is the first reason. And the second is obviously this:—The great God *will* not give to those who dishonour Him with doubts before His face. Let not *such a man* think that he will receive anything *from the Lord!* For *that* honour, at least, the rich Giver will have from us—that we confide in the love to which we make our appeal. To *faith* applies in its fullest sense His own word—Them that honour Me, I will honour! as to *unbelief* applies that other word—They that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed! (1 Sam. ii. 30). Finally, St James adds a third ground: Even *if* God, forgiving the doubt, should give, in the superabundance of His love, anything to such a man, it would be to him as good as *not* given, for he would not retain and improve that which he receives. For a doubter, properly a *wavering-minded,* divided, *double-spirited* man, is unsteady in all his ways. To him applies the rough word of the son of Sirach: "The inner parts of a fool

are like a broken vessel, and he will hold no knowledge as long as he liveth" (Ecclus. xxi. 14). What is obtained in and through doubt is lost in doubt; but from faith to faith is the rule of the true receiving and stedfast holding fast of grace.

Does, then, this severe conclusion take away again all the consolation of the gracious promise? God forbid! We should not give up all asking in despair, because some doubt still adheres to our petition. St James manifestly speaks only of a predominant believing or doubting, which rules the soul: if only our faith, which asks, doubt not, the weak heart may have many assaults which disparage not the reality of that faith. Our faithful Father demands not of His children perfection, before they have in the way of prayer pressed onward to it. He not merely hears strong faith; all actual believing avails as such before Him. Begin therefore boldly, and go on with greater boldness, to pray thyself into perfect faith; let thy little measure of faith withstand thy doubt, and pray against its being reckoned as thine. This is the art of believing supplication, which we must learn by perpetual practice. Thus, then, let us ask of God all that is lacking to us; especially wisdom, and that wisdom which trials require. Then shall we more and more abundantly obtain that which will create pure joy.

III.

THE REJOICING OF THE LOWLY AND THE EXALTED.

(Ch. i. 9–12.)

But let the brother of low degree glory in his exaltation: but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.

If we sought to do justice to every sentence and word of this Epistle we should be for ever beginning anew, and even then should not exhaust the fulness of any one of them. How might we preach on that single "*all joy!*" which resounds in

the midst of our tribulation! What an amazing word is that connected with it—*Count* it pure joy when we fall into temptations! That is the work of *faith*, the same faith by which, anticipating the future, we already *reckon ourselves* dead to sin and alive to God (Rom. vi. 11). Further, *patience* must hold fast its *work*, and accomplish it as a perfect work; thus the truly fundamental *work* is patience and waiting, by which alone we become perfect and entire. How much might be said upon this point too! Similarly, we have not done full justice to the paragraph vers. 6–8; for St James speaks very significantly concerning *doubting*, progressively indicating two meanings of the word: first, the doubting in *asking* simply; and then doubting as a permanent condition or character of a man's life and walk. Of the former, he begins by saying: *He that* doubteth, even in this individual supplication—so that doubt triumphs over the faith, instead of faith triumphing over the doubt—will not at least in this petition receive anything. For, the petitioner who would receive must be calm before God, not driven hither and thither like a wave of the sea. He then strengthens this, and passes over to the second meaning: Let not *that man*, who shows himself thus a doubter before God, think that he shall *receive* anything; that is, on account of his prayer, which was in reality no prayer, and as such could not be granted. Else, indeed, how *much* do we all receive from the Lord without our prayer, not only in earthly, but also heavenly gifts! For, how otherwise could we ever extricate ourselves from the tribulation and sorrow of our evil unbelieving heart? Faith, awakened by prevenient gifts, says, This was of thy giving, O Lord! and thus learns to ask for more. But, finally, St James speaks of a *man*, who, instead of being a man in the energy and courage of faith, continually gives up half his heart to doubt; and the half-hearted faith, which he thinks he has, is therefore none, and comes to nothing. All the result in this case is a perpetual wavering and vacillation in his variable and distracted way. This would furnish matter for a specific meditation; but that we must leave to those who would prosecute the subject, lest it should too long interrupt the connection of the Epistle. Let us now consider how the demand to *ask* is followed immediately by a *challenge to glorying*.

Obviously the same is meant that is written elsewhere, Let

him that glorieth glory in the Lord! (1 Cor. i. 31). St James expressly directs his word against all false boasting; for, when he speaks of the exaltation of the lowly, and the humiliation of the rich, he makes all stand on the same level before God, who alone exalts and lays low. He that asks of God in faith shall receive! This had preceded, and accordingly one might expect to hear—Let him, then, to whom it hath been given, so that he has become rich in gifts and graces, not glory; but the word takes the opposite turn—But let the brother who is *low* rejoice in his *exaltation!* The *rich*, on the other hand, receives the direction, as warning rather than encouragement, Let him rejoice in his being *made low!* And, because this is the more striking, let us take our start from it rather than the former.

Are we to understand that St James means the *rich* in the ordinary, external meaning of the word? Doubtless he thinks first of all of them, as the continuation of the discourse, compared with other passages in it which have to do with the rich of this world, shows: ch. ii. 6, 7, v. 1–5. Particularly in that last closing passage he predicts, as here in the beginning, though much more keenly, the passing away, and rusting, and perishing of all their possessions. There is no ground, therefore, of boasting in them: Let not the rich man glory in his riches! (Jer. ix. 23). Those who put their trust in their riches are told in the forty-ninth Psalm, that as man abideth not in his honour, but must leave his wealth to others, while his own soul is not redeemed, he is like the beast which perisheth—unless he have that wisdom and understanding which God would impart to both low and high, rich and poor together. "As the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth!" How often is this the case during the course of the rich man's life; how certain is it in the end! For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass (1 Pet. i. 24). Boast not thyself then, O rich man! Thou art set in slippery places (Ps. lxxiii. 18). In the midst of *thy business* (this is St James' word) thou shalt fade away: while forming thy plans in this or that place to buy and sell, thy life will vanish! (ch. iv. 13, 14). But of such rich men St James is not *here* speaking; he refers assuredly to a *brother* who is rich

—only to such can he attribute a boasting or rejoicing. And what rejoicing? Let the brother that is rich rejoice that he is made low! Mark that well! Rejoice in *this*, that thou knowest the Lord, who dealeth in mercy upon earth, and giveth grace to the humble; that thou hast seen the danger, and escaped the snare of riches, and art no longer a camel too large for the needle's eye; that thou hast found security against destruction, and a better hope than fleeting riches can afford. It is the curse of all whom the old serpent deceives to go upon the earth like him, and like him to eat the dust. Rejoice that thou hast learned this; rejoice in thy *lowliness* before God as a spiritually poor man, who is not wanting in His spiritual gifts; so that, as a brother of the poor, thou art also an inheritor of the kingdom, and *rich in God!*

Does St James' word further mean, only taking the external riches as a figure, a *spiritually rich man* too? This we may certainly assume, but it must be rightly understood. He cannot refer to the Pharisee, who flatters himself in the riches and virtues of his own possession; for he is not a brother, and in no sense *made low*, has no lowliness in which he may rejoice. He means the Christian who is a true believer and has received grace; and distinctively such a believer as is already beyond others rich in gifts. And to him he warningly says, Rejoice not as a wise man in thy wisdom, as a strong man in thy strength, as a rich man in thy riches; rejoice rather in the Lord, of whose mercy and grace all this comes, as a brother of the blessed who glorify God in all His gifts. Fancy not that thou hast securely thine own what has been given thee; think not thyself merely in thy wisdom a teacher of others, and in thy fulness a giver to others, forget not thyself continually anew to seek grace for grace. Otherwise thou rejoicest in thy own *pride*, and all such rejoicing is evil (ch. iv. 16). Otherwise, in the heat of temptation, even thy spiritual branch will fade away; all will be again taken from thee; and thou thyself mayest perish in thy pride. Take David's humility before the ark of the covenant as thy pattern, who said to Saul's proud daughter: "Before the Lord, who chose me before thy father, will I play and rejoice; and I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight; and of the maid-servants which thou hast scorned will I be had in honour!" (2 Sam. vi.

20, 21). Note well what is still lacking in thy spiritual riches; and learn to rejoice most gladly in thine infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in thee (2 Cor. xii. 9). Then alone wilt thou be able safely to say with the same Apostle, I can be high and abound without loss to my abasement (Phil. iv. 12). Then wilt thou say with the Psalmist, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me" (Ps. cxxxi. 1). But let the brother who has been rich, and has not retained his lowliness of heart, take shame to himself instead of rejoicing; let him abase himself, and be clothed again with humility! For God resisteth the proud, while He giveth grace to the humble. Therefore the exhortation still is—Humble yourselves under the hand of God, and He will exalt you (Jas. iv. 6–10; 1 Pet. v. 5, 6). This makes the high and the rich the same as the low and the poor; and so must it be in the presence of the Lord.

But let the brother who is low rejoice in that he is exalted! This we shall now understand aright, and no longer think of false self-exaltation. Those who humble themselves will *God* exalt *in due time.* And this time is for faith already come. This word *low* is certainly meant by St James in the spiritual sense; he intends it for consolation, because he has so sharply distinguished between faith and doubt that many a poor, weak brother might be made anxious by his words. Is thy faith yet weak? Is this among the hardest of thy trials, that thou art still inwardly assaulted by unbelief and doubt? that thou art not as rich in the prayed-for wisdom and patience as thou fain wouldst be? Nevertheless, if thou hast any faith at all, let it inspire thee with a cheerful courage; for to the poor, who as yet have nothing, is promised all things; they shall assuredly receive all they need, if they mourn over sin, and hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed is that glorying which rises out of deep lowliness into the exaltation of God: I may and I *can* ask and receive; what my faith hopes to receive it hath already; I am poor in myself, but rich in God!—And art thou in this state of mind *poor* and lowly in external things? Thou art nevertheless a *brother;* and every rich man who, from a false respect of persons, fails to recognise thee as such, will be liable to condemnation for that. Be not anxious, as if thy God, who giveth thee the kingdom, could neglect or forsake

thee. If thou hast chosen at the feet of Jesus the better part, it shall never be taken from thee throughout eternity. O how high and glorious is thy inheritance! Continue only to ask for the enlightenment of the eyes of thine understanding, that thou mayest know what is the hope of thy calling, what the glorious riches of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power in thee, who *believest!* (Eph. i. 18, 19). Brethren, can ye all thus in your lowliness rejoice in being exalted?—Alas! St James, with all his graciousness, sets before us a very hard problem; it is not so easy to reach this end, which is itself the very simplicity of faith, looking solely and undistractedly at grace and the goal of it. We should all contemplate this from the weakest beginning of our faith; and go on to learn more and more how to make this our sole glorying. But such lowly ones we become, and such glorying we can rejoice in, when God not only humbles us by His Holy Spirit, that He may exalt us, but also lays His mighty hand upon us in *trials*. Therefore St James speaks at once of this latter; and thus returns back again to his first topic.

As certainly as the faithful God, the God of all grace, who hath called us to His eternal glory, will prepare us fully for that glory, so certainly does He make it necessary that we should suffer a while (1 Pet. v. 10). Woe, and nothing but woe, upon the guilty head of the man whose own fault it is that he is double-minded and unstable in all his ways! But *blessed is the man who endureth temptation*, who abides the test, and who is confirmed as a man of strong faith by the obedience of suffering! We must all, well or ill, experience chastisement, for God dealeth with us all as with children (Heb. xii. 7). Therefore St James comprehends all the manifold temptations in one; speaks of *the trial* as the certain portion of every one, and already his portion, during the earthly probationship. God draws His children in mass towards the heavenly inheritance, humbling and purifying them to that end; He measures out to each *the* trial which with the supreme wisdom of love has been appointed to him, while to all is measured out, according to their ability and vocation, *the equal* temptation, in perfect righteousness. Especially let every rich and exalted man know this, and understand, and make good use of his own! If in the burning heat his godliness passes away, so that he may think

himself rejected, even that may turn to his salvation. If he mark before it is too late that one thing had been lacking to him, because he was not willing to sell all that he had; if he surrenders himself into the hands of God, and submits to the spoiling of his goods, and learns the discipleship of the cross —*blessed is that man!* This is a better glorying than the former. The blind, proud world gives the name of *man* to him who proudly defies suffering, who relaxes not his false, hard courage; but "the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit" (Eccles. vii. 8), and the true patience of faith, which is found in the deepest humility before God, alone brings a good end. Woe to the man who will not become of a lowly heart when God in fidelity humbles him; who will not become subject to the Father of spirits, that the fatherly chastisement may do him good! Trial comes to us all; but it is the right deportment in trial, the *enduring*, which alone brings the final confirmation of faith. And again, thou canst not be a crowned victor until *after* thou hast been thus tested and approved. It is but a short period of conflict; *the* one test, after which there is no probation, but thou shalt receive the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that passeth not away. When it is said—*Blessed* is the man! *that* is an abiding and effectual glorying. But do not rejoice too soon; death will perhaps bring to thee a last trial, and it will depend upon that. Arm thyself well through patience against that; exercise thyself well in that faith which preserves its confidence in the *promise* of eternal truth, the fidelity of which is the prop of our hope. If we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm unto the end! (Heb. iii. 6). All true glorying, which maketh not ashamed, is the glorying of hope; all hope refers to the *future* glory, which God will give (Rom. v. 2): He *will* give it to those to whom He has promised it: *to those who love Him.* This is, finally, the inmost strength and victorious energy of faith in patience, not to be separated from the love of God, to yield ourselves up so fully to that love that it may be perfectly shed abroad in us unto a perfect love in return; that we learn at last to merge all in this one tribute of glory to Him—Thou hast loved us, and washed us from our sins! Therefore, let us *not* love the world, but the Father; *not* love our own life unto death; but count all things pure joy which may help to win our love from ourselves,

and fix it upon Him who hath loved us: so shall we receive the crown of life!

IV.

THE ORIGIN AND END OF EVIL.

(Ch. i. 13–15.)

Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

St James has spoken of manifold trials, and then of the one great *trial* of the whole of life, in which fidelity is to be confirmed to the end. The word in the original is the same with our "*temptation*," and there is a strict connection between the two: every trial tempts me in such a manner that I may fall in it, and fail to be approved, and lose again the crown of which I thought myself sure; on the other hand, every temptation may, as a trial, be endured and victoriously overcome. Nevertheless, there remains a great difference between these two aspects of the same thing, a difference which our Epistle now begins to disclose, in order to obviate all misconception, and at the same time to exhibit the first firm fundamental principles of that *wisdom* which had been previously spoken of. That there is a necessity for our all being tested and approved through trial, springs from our sin; the tempting element in our trial, the evil in it, springs therefore from that, and not from God. The important point here is rightly to know and distinguish between sin and grace, evil and good. The suffering of trial itself leads us deeper and deeper into the living experience of this distinction; yet we should know that distinction beforehand, in order not to be led astray. Therefore St James proceeds to speak of this; and testifies that evil, or even tendency to evil, comes by no means from God, the Giver of every good gift, the Father of light. As to this most important fundamental truth he cries in affectionate warning: *Do not err*, my beloved brethren! His words concerning evil and concerning good, vers. 13–18, are

strictly connected; but let us first consider how he here teaches us *the most essential and inmost origin and the final end of evil.*

The origin of *evil* is absolutely and assuredly *not of God!* That philosophy which will not accept the doctrine of the Fall in Scripture tends to make its so-called God the Father of darkness as well as of light. But there are many who know not that philosophy, who can scarcely understand it when proposed to them, who have no other answer for the question, *Whence come the tares?* but, *An enemy hath done this!* and yet err, and need the earnest warning, necessary to us all—*Let no man say*, when he is tempted, that he is tempted *of God!* That is, tempted *to evil;* for God tempts us to good for ever. But we all do say so naturally; it is the deep-rooted delusion of our pride. The natural man stiff-neckedly strives in every way to justify himself, that is, in the end to lay the fault upon God; even as the pleas of the "man" throughout the Epistle to the Romans continue down to the last—Why doth He then find fault? Who can withstand His will? (Rom. ix. 10). Even in Paradise the deceitfulness of the first sin at once so far obscured the perception of God, that the fallen pair hide themselves from their Creator, and would excuse themselves before their Judge. Adam said—"The woman whom Thou gavest me;" that is, "Thou Thyself art the cause of my sin!" Eve said—"The serpent;" that is, again, "That which came from Thyself, and not from us! Wherefore didst Thou make it, or leave it in our Paradise?" Alas! since then all their descendants have done the same: every man, from whom this vain imagination is not thoroughly eradicated, rests at least unconsciously upon this secret pillow of evil excuse, which God at last appeals against and condemns.

So speak *the tempted,* if not with their lips, yet in their hearts; instead of learning, in the patience of approved faith, that the trial will, in God's purpose and will, tend to salvation. If that end is not attained in the case of many, who fall in the trial—that was not of God! The sincere should in faith firmly hold fast the conviction that God is faithful, who will not suffer them to be tempted above what they are able, but with the temptation open a way of escape, that they may be able to bear it (1 Cor. x. 13). And when it seems to go beyond human ability to bear, even then God imparts with the

test the power also to sustain it, through His own ability. This He does assuredly always and everywhere; this will the approved in temptation one day exhibit to the lost in their own experience.

Thus thy sin is not through fault in God, or to be attributed to His will. As He Himself is in His purity *untemptable* of evil (this is St James' word), so also He tempts no man thus, that is, that he should or must will or act evil, commit sin and fall. Yet those who are *led into error* say thus: all their excuses amount to this in the end—Relations and circumstances were so adverse; others allured and deceived me; these or those things, these or those persons, were in fault. And what is this but a repetition of our progenitors' words to God—Thou Thyself didst order, permit, and ordain it thus! Hear, on the contrary, the wisdom of the son of Sirach: "Say not thou, It is through the Lord that I fell away: for thou oughtest not to do the things that He hateth. Say not thou, He hath caused me to err: for He hath no need of the sinful man" (Ecclus. xv. 11, 12). Probably, those who mislead thee would retort, and lay thy guilt upon thine own ready sympathy and complicity with their sin; or the misleader, whom thou blamest, might with perfect right say—If there had been in thee no tinder for my spark, it would not have set thee on fire! The heart and will of a man (in which alone sin can be found) is as a fast fortress, which no enemy from without can subdue, if no traitor within opens its gates. How many there are who make that sure enough in regard to some things in which they will not be overcome; they can say, This I will not do! Why not, therefore, in regard to the seduction to sin, into which thou shouldst not enter?

That is most true, say or think these sinners; but what can I do in the *weakness* of my sinful nature, in the *flesh* with which I was born, in my inherited tendency to sin? Many boldly hold to this, and in one way or another press their claim for justification. Either they say—Why does He demand a holiness from us, which is impossible to our ruined nature? Or, on the other side—We have a good intention, and all our sinning is only weakness and not sin! Such wicked sophistry adheres secretly to us all, and, thus exhibited, is precisely like the word of Adam—The woman whom Thou gavest me as a companion! Our flesh, our weakness, has become to us in reality as necessary and as dear as to him Eve, when what she gave him he ate—and accord

ingly laid to her the sin of all! But God gave her to him as a help-meet, and not as a seducer; that she became the latter was neither the act of God's creation nor His will. So with all upon which we would throw the guilt of our own sin, from the heaviest temptation and the most urgent seduction down to the seducer within ourselves, God made it not for temptation. He did indeed create Adam in such a manner that even in Paradise *test* through commandment was needful and salutary; but he might as certainly have stood in the test as he actually fell in it.

The commandment or the prohibition was not in fault, as if he might have been able to say—Wherefore hast Thou then forbidden this one tree? or, Wherefore didst Thou not hedge it round with terrors of death?[1] as if the eating of the tree was the sin, and not the lust to eat thereof! as if the *freedom* of the created spirit and will might not be subjected to the holy law of obedience towards the Creator, even as it contradicted that law! Our sin is not occasioned and rendered sinful by the *law*, which God should rather not have imposed upon us; nor by the *devil*, whose seduction may have laid force upon our wills, or could have done so. The law is not sin, but is holy; His commandment is holy, just, and good. But the sin which already exists takes occasion by the commandment, and excites lust; it is by the commandment made known and manifest (Rom. vii. 7–13). The devil—of whose fall St James here says nothing, because he has to do with man's lust and sin, but of whom he is well aware—is a seducer indeed, but only a seducer; and all who have fallen under his temptation into evil from the beginning, have from the beginning received the word—"Submit yourselves unto God; resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas. iv. 7). Eve could only say—The serpent *deceived* me; not—The serpent compelled me. What was in her the temptation, which admitted and received the deception, the lie of the tempter against God's word, but *her lust?*

Every man is tempted, when he is enticed and led away of *his own lust:* this is the inmost original and source of all evil. Evil is for ever—as opposed to God—the *own possession* of the creature. When Satan speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own

[1] As in 2 Esdras vii. 46: "This is my first and last saying, that it had been better not to have given the earth unto Adam: or else, when it was given him, to have restrained him from sinning."

(John viii. 44). When we are deceived by him, it is through our own will, and our own lust. *Nothing from without* can bring sin into any will. It was not the tree standing before her eyes which wrought Eve the harm; she might have beheld it in the fear of obedience, in the conviction of faith—that it would be *evil* to eat of it, and *therefore* that it was not a tree pleasant to the eye. And if it had been a tree of poison, He who placed it in the garden, with the deadly superscription over it, surely did not constrain to touch it. It was not the serpent which bewitched Eve, as men say that the glance of serpents will constrain birds and small creatures to enter their jaws. Our mother knew well what God had said, and might have adhered to it; as the little child in the garden may answer to those who would entice it to the forbidden tree—My father has told me that this is poison. But she believed the serpent, disbelieving God's word, and in the curiosity of pride! So in every sin of ours, it is not the enticement of any object or of any word from without, but *his own lust*, of which *any man* is tempted. That is, any man among us sinful men; that St James will not include the Redeemer is obvious of itself. Christ was indeed for us all the Man of faith, approved in trial and temptation, the Captain of obedience; but His being tempted was without sin; in His unsinful infirmity the strength of God conquered with that absolute victory to which alone the crown is really and of pure right due. We who are conceived of sinful seed have something beyond the weakness which adheres to being born of woman.

Nevertheless, every man's own *lust*, though his own from birth, is no *compulsion* to him. Although every man may have in a still more specific sense, according to the temperament and inherited tendency of his body and soul, *his own* lust, he himself, who finds and feels it in his nature, is not one with it; man's lusts are not like the instincts of animals. St James says, and rightly, only "*drawn away* and *enticed*." Further, let it be carefully noted, he does not say that this being drawn away and enticed is itself sin; but—is tempted to sin; by no means—he *sinneth!* He only lays bare the source from which *afterwards* sin flows, *if* it has free course, and if the lust impregnated by the will brings forth. In the lust, which is now our own to us all, so that we must all *suffer* it, is our Eve as it were exhibited; if Adam, the will of the spirit, instead of showing himself lord,

succumbs and follows her bidding, then in every new instance a new Fall as it were takes place. This *internal consent* with the lust is the first essential *sin*. If God said to Cain, "Let not thy desire have its will, but thou shalt rule over it!" when *sin* nevertheless was already at the door of his evil and increasingly evil heart,—how much more applicable will be the universal commandment to every one, who has a personal lust of his own, *Thou shalt not* lust! But if we give to the desire its will, or rather yield up our will to it, and become one with it, then it becomes perfect *lust*, which the *conceiving* desire could thus alone *bring forth*. But the lust of the will is alone the true and proper *sin*, not the external act, before which in every case the same sin has been accomplished in heart. The thief must confess with Achan, "I coveted them and took them" (Josh. vii. 21). The adulterer or murderer in act was previously such in mind. What if, when Eve put her hand forth to take the fruit, a thunderbolt from God had struck her hand back? She would nevertheless have accomplished the transgression; even as Abraham, on the other hand, had accomplished the sacrifice of his son when he stretched out his hand and took the knife. If, on the fall of Satan, one of the angels, instead of crying with Michael, *Who is like God?* had secretly consented and said in heart, *I also would!* he would thereby have been an angel no longer, but a devil. Thus there is with us the secret complacency with others' sins, which makes us partakers of their guilt. They have pleasure in those that do them, saith the Apostle (Rom. i. 32). Yea, verily, there are many who are secretly envious at others' enjoyment of the sin, which they themselves denounce in judgment and rebuke; their denunciation is bitter because their hearts are saying—If there were no commandment, and no disgrace, I also would do the same! They most assuredly condemn themselves, even in their condemnation of others.

We know by experience that our own lust is stirred from the beginning in earliest infancy, and that the rising of it is exhibited in every child; but we too often, alas! overlook—and in this particular the deniers of original sin have some ground of right—that freedom to overcome this lust is also present from the beginning. Only set before the child a stronger enticement; impress upon him a mighty fear of peril and punishment; let the victorious love to his parents oppose his desires, and those

desires will be often overcome: but what it is capable of doing once, that it must always be capable of doing. Therefore, if thou, poor, weak, sinful man, who hast grown up in thy sin, sayest, "I *am* now such and such!" in that thou art right. But if thou goest further in thy bold excuse, "What else can I do? did I make myself?" in that thou art only half right, and already art more than half wrong. But if thou wouldst, contrary to St James' warning, go to the whole extreme, and say, "Why has God so made me, or suffered me to become what I am?" thy wrong is altogether without any semblance of right. God suffered thee to be born with thy own lust, but also with the same word in thy conscience which He spoke to Cain. Hast thou withstood thy lust, as in the beginning thou mightest have done? We have all increased for ourselves our original sin; strictly speaking, we have for ourselves made it our own actual sin in the will. The present lust of every one has not become so strong without a multitude of compliances, and these have made it now subject to their law; the conception and birth, then the growth of sin to strength in acts, has become new in every individual through his own personal guilt. The *possibility* that a descendant of Adam should from the beginning withstand his lusts, must on the one hand be admitted, on account of the freedom of the will; although on other grounds it has never become an actual reality. Here we must pause with the word of St James, without any such further pondering as might lead us to one-sided dogmatics. He teaches us the same as the song of Moses expressed: "A God of truth and *without iniquity*, just and right is He. Men have corrupted themselves; their spot is not the spot of His children—that they are not His children, that is *their own blot;*—they are a perverse and crooked generation" (Deut. xxxii. 4, 5).

What then is to be done, since it is actually thus with us all? since in us all sin has conceived and has brought forth sin? We must *cry to Him for help*, who did not make and hath no pleasure in sin, from whom all good and no evil comes. This certainly we can do. Even a heathen may do this; and it sometimes occurs that he finds grace even in the midst of his deep darkness. But to us as Christians, to whom help is offered and most freely preached, the duty is to *lay hold upon this help!* And to what end must we lay hold of and use this help? In order that we

may continually cut off the sins which continually grow, in word and deed? That we may attain to a so-called virtue, which we shall neither speak nor do that which is evil? Oh no, dear brethren! The axe must be laid at the root; the root must be rooted out; otherwise the fruit of evil must continually re-appear. Lust bringeth forth *sin;* that is, according to St James' true word, not the sin of word or act, but the first and proper sin of the heart. Say not that thy consent to lust is not of itself sin! If thou so think, and therefore suffer and trifle with such inward consent, woe unto thee! That is opening the door, in the vain delusion that the enemy will not enter; it is to seek to dry up the swelling watercourse without damming up its source. The spark, if it falls upon the tinder, must needs kindle fire. The seed is in the soil, and how should it not grow! It is with sin as with *conception* and *birth:* as the child is born at its time, because it was already in the mother's womb, so does the sin exhibit itself when lust has conceived by the will. As the child, when born, grows and thrives, and at first very rapidly, so does the *sin* born in the heart grow and thrive in the life. No weed sprouts so strong and quickly, no water gushes so abundantly, no fire burns so devouringly, as *sin*. See how sin, even from Adam to Cain, had grown up to murder and defiance of God! See how it then waxed down to the death of all flesh in the judgment of the flood! So is it still with every one: in the inmost principle of evil—if the grace of God do not hinder it—there already lies the whole way of ruin down to the *final end.*

But sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death! About this only a short, but solemn word, as in the text. Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether *of sin unto death*, or of obedience unto righteousness? When ye yielded your members to the service of uncleanness, and from one unrighteousness to another, what fruit had ye then in those things? What are ye ashamed of now? for the end of these things *is death* (Rom. vi. 16, 19, 21). Yes, verily, from one unrighteousness to another, through dying and perishing in sure process—such is the so-called life of sin! And if it reaches its *full growth*, then sin brings forth, as itself had been brought forth. And what brings it forth but that which long before was concealed in it? It *bringeth forth* or *out—death!* So says St James, and means it in the full

sense of the word in the New Testament; as where it is said that death is the wages of sin, and as also in the beginning, Thou shalt surely die! Adam and Eve sin—and at once the light and life of God in their souls begins its course of extinction and death. They flee, they lie, they speak against God (though this last as it were without knowledge, though not altogether without will); of these first sinners an entire humanity is born which lieth in death, and which must go on to death—only to be redeemed by the bitter death of Christ. Blessed be God! The *gift of His grace* is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Hold that fast in faith, O sinner, and then thy evil shall yet have a *good finishing*—an end and issue deserving of the name. Otherwise thou wilt and must urge thy way whither thy lust, thy sin, for ever urges thee. Every *lust*, which thou dost not crucify and kill, *is* and *becomes* sin—think well of that! Every actual sin strengthens the lust, and goes on to new and greater sins, even unto death! If all the confessions of lost sinners were before us, with endless differences they would all agree in their history, going back to the original history of sin:—tempted of their own lust, then thus the birth of sin, then the growth of sin, and out of it the birth of death. To escape from death and to be saved into life, is to escape from sin, to overcome our own lust, and finally to root it out through the gift and grace of God. *To this* St James now leads the readers of his Epistle; speaks in direct opposition of the good which He giveth, of man's regeneration by His grace through the Spirit.

V.

ALL GOOD GIFTS FROM ABOVE.

(Ch. i. 16–18.)

Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, and changing shadow. Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.

"*Do not err*, my beloved brethren!" How are we to understand this brief, affectionate, and impressive word? Does it not

ascribe too much to us—that is, taking the words literally, as St James accustoms us to do in his words? We feel disposed at first to retreat behind that wise proverb, which itself does not err —*To err is human!* Yes, verily, my brethren, that is, alas, perfectly true; but on that very account be on your guard against being led astray into the worst error. Is the proverb to be so interpreted as to make us indifferent and thoughtless, because error is excused before the vain bar of human opinion? God forbid! That were to pervert the wise word by the most infatuated folly. *To sin* also is human: should we therefore make sin to be a light thing? And that St James is not speaking of the unhurtful deviation to the right or left, but of an error which is closely connected with *sin* and *death*, we should feel quite sure, even if nothing were said to that effect. Do not err, *beloved brethren*, is his affectionate counsel and supplication. Love does not judge the erring brother, but helps him to attain the truth: it would convert the sinner from the error of his way, to save the soul from death (ch. v. 20). Love counsels, and warns, and teaches, in order to save. Dost thou say, on the contrary, "But a little error is not hurtful!" take care what thou sayest. In many earthly matters this may be true; and yet, what man willingly errs even in the most trivial things? Who does not feel vexed and ashamed about it afterwards? Our perverted mind sometimes takes it more ill to be charged with error by a fellow-mortal, than to be charged with sin by God! Even in earthly affairs a very great evil may easily spring from a very slight error; as a very slight deviation from the right course leads our way farther and farther from the right. And so there is an error in knowledge of Divine things, which itself springs from error in the heart and will, and leads onward to more and more. It is of that St James speaks; and we must not answer him by saying—A little error or sin can do no mischief! He warns us against going altogether astray from the way of life. Woe unto those who fall into the full ruin of sin, through the full error of sin; who never received the solemn word—Do not err! God is not mocked! That which a man soweth, that shall he also reap! (Gal. vi. 7). But woe also to those who lightly regard a trifling error in its beginning, and find themselves led away by degrees into the same absolute destruction!

What is that perilous byeway of fancy, what error sinful in

itself, and plunging into deeper sin, does St James mean here especially? According to the connection, it is manifestly the forgetting and perverting of the great fundamental truth, that *with us* alone there is sin with its lust and guilt, with God alone grace and good. He would show us the true ground and source of evil and of good, that we may not remain in most perilous and fruitful error on these points. He has already spoken of the evil, whence alone it comes, and whence the temptation to it; he now continues, by showing us the *sole source of all good.*

The next word of his wisdom, which children learn, and yet men cannot sufficiently understand, is strictly speaking untranslateable in our language; for, like many such profound sayings in and out of the Bible, it has a double sense. But it is not, as in the case of the proverb we have just quoted, a dangerous saying which may mislead; for, the word of God speaks only salutary truth, when it compresses into one compact expression two sides of the same matter. The original may be here read —*Pure good gift*, nothing but good gift cometh from above; and also—*Every good gift* cometh from above, cometh from nowhere else. But both are true: let us consider them one after the other.

Thus first: *Nothing but good* gift cometh from above, from the Father of light, with whom there is no darkness: these last words plainly point to *this* first meaning. *Nothing that is evil cometh from above, or from God!* For God is the Father *of lights*, as the original means; that is (according to another Scripture, Heb. xii. 9), the Father and Creator of spirits, which as pure rays of the primitive light have their origin from Him, and, as the *morning stars* in His light, as the *children of God*, sang together at the first creation (Job xxxviii. 7). But the expression is again twofold in its meaning: the lights of heaven, the stars and suns shining above, where to us is the throne of God, are the figures as well as the dwelling-place of the pure spiritual world; the *light*, as the first beginning of the physical creation and nearest to God, is poured out over them for a figure and testimony of sacred glory. *God is a light*—is, as we know, the declaration of all Scripture; and St James developes this truth in very profound words, which the translation gives plainly enough for the common apprehension, but which must be carefully understood—with whom there is not, in whom

there dwelleth not, *change* or *shadow of turning*, or *vicissitude*. The Holy Spirit speaks, in this word of St James, of things which human science did not recover the knowledge of until late, and is now first beginning fully to learn. There are bodies or stars, like our earth, which have not always light, but through their revolutions have alternate night and day. *These* are the stars of which Moses records that they did not, like the morning stars of which Job speaks, as already existing in the heavens behold the foundations of the earth, but were created or brought to view on the fourth day. Thus they all belong to the earth, to this *lower* world (which astronomers call the solar system, but might also call it *earth-system*), where light and darkness alternate, to *the* creation in which God commanded the light to shine out of darkness (2 Cor. iv. 6). That old first darkness, of which Moses speaks in the second verse of Scripture, God, the Father of lights and of light, did not create. He could never have said, Let there be darkness! Darkness is the product and the witness of the first apostasy in the light-heaven of the first creation; therefore it said only, God saw that the light was good. Where there is only good, there is only light. So in the upper spaces of heaven the suns—like our sun, an example brought nearer to us—themselves opaque and dark like the earth, yet are wrapped in light without alternation. This pure light-world of stars and angels is *above* in relation to our earthly and planetary *below:* and this St James means when he says *from above*. Thence comes only good, from the Father of lights. The earth before the fall of Satan—from which alone darkness came (Acts xxvi. 18; Col. i. 12, 13)—was also light without alternation and change; and the new light of grace comes to it again from God, until in its transfiguration there shall be no more day and night (Rev. xxi. 25). Thus the whole external world is only a figure. Thus St James exhibits to us with profound truth God, the original fountain of light and of good, as being as it were the *original and central Sun*. He who says, "I am the Lord, *I change not!*" (Mal. iii. 6), knoweth *of and in* Himself no darkness or shadow, so that *He* should receive the light from above upon Himself, or should *turn towards or away from* the light; and therefore nothing but light, that is, good, cometh from Him. But evil hath come with the darkness, since through sin the below and

the abyss have come into being. Thus *no evil is from above!* This has a broad and deep meaning, which we now only hint at for intelligent minds.

And, first, no *temptation* is from God, no drawing or enticing to evil, since evil itself can never be from God or the will of God. *Concerning this* St James has spoken to us already. To have such a thought in the mind is the worst possible *error*, is blasphemy, is a denial of the Father of lights; and though such a delusion may, as an apology for sin, only in secret beguile our souls, it is yet the most perilous of all errors. The fundamental wisdom of our knowledge and conscience must hold this fast with immoveable fidelity:—only from ourselves and in ourselves is evil, from Him and with Him only good!

But, we may ask, is not the *darkness* of *evil and misery*, the suffering which becomes our trial, from the hand and counsel of God! In this sense, indeed, the Lord Himself speaks in the Prophets: I make light, and I create the darkness; I make peace, and bring evil (Is. xlv. 7). But even here too—Do not err, beloved brethren; do not misunderstand this! That we have indeed, as our planet has, day and night in our life; that happiness and sorrow alternate, or that in our day the assembling clouds hide from us the sun;—is for the present time God's appointment and will. But as this springs from our sin, and not from the original purpose of God, who could not desire the unhappiness of any of His creatures, so also the *gift* of God in our evil and unhappiness is only good; in the very curse itself there is a secret blessing, which aims to abolish the sin, and repair its miserable consequences. Night in itself is not evil; rather its dark womb prepares the seeds of light and life for the day. Foul weather, so called, hurts not, but works the blessing of prosperity and growth. So Lazarus suffered evil in his lifetime, which however prepared him for the everlasting comfort; that evil was to him, as the gift of God, as much *good* as the good things of the rich man. Had God known concerning this latter that he would have sustained the test, it would have been applied to him also; for His fidelity diligently leads every one without neglect out of darkness, and through the darkness to light. That has been the marvellous procedure of the Eternal Light with our souls from the beginning of the Fall.

The darkness condemns sin, and makes manifest that the light alone is good; he who submits to be judged in grace, will be enlightened and saved. Unhappiness and evil mixing themselves, become the means of salvation against the evil. The curse of banishment from Paradise was at first the best blessing which God had for Adam. Finally, in Christ, the second Adam, all becomes fully manifest: not by might from without can God abolish the sin in the will of the fallen creature; but He giveth His life to death, His light into the darkness, that out of the sin of the world the reconciliation of the world, out of the curse of death the blessing of life, out of the darkness of the cross the new imperishable nature, should come to light. And now for ever we walk in the same way through sufferings to glory, through much tribulation into the kingdom of God. *God's gift* in suffering and in trial is no other than our salvation: *this* must be known and accepted; in this it behoves us, as the most momentous truth in our probation, not to err! Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good (1 Pet. iii. 13); if ye believingly lay hold of that good thing which is not wanting even in the troubles concerning which ye say—We receive evil from God? To those who love God as the supreme and only Good, who persist stedfastly in that love, all things work together for good; and the best thing for us in order to our eternal advantage is the manifold trial which through patience works out salvation. Therefore, let us not proudly or foolishly complain against God, and reject the good as if it were evil! But let us well understand that we cannot help or redeem ourselves; that, indeed, with us nothing but evil is found!

This is the second meaning of St James' saying: *Every* good gift cometh *from above*, from that God who alone hath it to give, whose light alone re-illumines our darkness. *Nothing good cometh from below!* There is no internal help even against external tribulation. As every good gift, life and breath, and all things which the sustentation of life requires from our mother's womb, has come from the hand of God—so He, and He alone, is our Redeemer and Helper in the time of need. "From Him is good all over the earth: therefore, my son, in thy sickness be not negligent; but pray unto the Lord, and He will make thee whole" (Ecclus. xxxviii. 8, 9). When thou art

in trouble, vain is thy own help and the help of man (Ps. lx. 11); seek it of the Lord, who is the King of old, working all the salvation that is in the midst of the earth (Ps. lxxiv. 12). Whatsoever might help thee in thyself, or in another man, must first be received of God: it is not indeed independent of thyself, and all appropriate means; but, if it be effectual *help*, it must come directly from above. The *consolation* in trouble which comes from below is vanity, deception, and ruin. The "merry heart" which we may create in ourselves must lapse back into deeper misery; and the peace which is false cannot endure. Alas, what we in our perverted thoughts "count all joy," turns sooner or later into pure sorrow. We are useless physicians to ourselves, with whatever unguents we anoint our hurt; miserable comforters are we to our own poor souls, if we seek to find rest in any other way than that of inward sanctification. But the grace of God *comforts all who mourn* (Is. lxi. 2). Lust in us bringeth forth sin, and sin death; this fountain of evil in us must be dried up, and a new spring of life opened up within our souls. This *good gift* of God for us poor sinners *cometh from above*, and that without cessation or change; the true light of the life of God shineth uninterruptedly into the darkness of our night; the sun of grace stands unveiled in the heavens above us, and sendeth forth its beams, its lights, angels, messengers, and gifts, so that we have nothing to do but in faith to receive, and in patience to hold fast, the gift; and if we are oppressed as Israel was, when the sea was before and the Egyptians behind—"Fear not; stand still, and see the salvation of God! The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace!" (Ex. xiv. 13, 14). In quietness and hope shall ye be strong (Is. xxx. 15).

But who can do this? Who may thus abide in the patience of faith unto his final confirmation and glorification in the light of God, so that the Father's good gift may have the victory over the evil in himself, life in the Father's light have the victory over the darkness of death? Only he who by faith has become one of God's people; who has received through that faith, but from the grace and gift coming down from above, a new heart and a new spirit; only he who has been begotten of the Father as a child of light, and no longer walketh in darkness. *Therefore* St James speaks not merely of every good gift

generally; but strengthens the expression, and names it the *perfect gift*, which restores to us light and life in a *regeneration* from God. What would avail all other gifts of God to us sinners, born of the flesh, and children of death, without this fundamental gift? To the natural man all good coming from God is perverted into evil by sin, the greater guilt and punishment of unthankfulness and misuse; to the regenerate all evil, springing from his own sin and the sin of the world, is changed into good through grace. Thus we understand in what necessary connection St James goes on to say, concerning the Father of lights, that of His free will He hath begotten us through the word of truth, that we might be the first-fruits of His creatures. All His other good gifts testify *of this;* they lead, and most persuasively invite, us to come to this good Father. The water which we drink, and the bread which we eat, say to us—If thou knewest the gift of God, the meat and the drink which is unto eternal life! We know, O Christians, in Whom the Father giveth to us the "unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. ix. 15). Death is the wages of sin; but God's *gift of grace* is eternal life, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Christ, God has given Himself to us as a Father, that we may become His children—lights without darkness of shadow, beams and mirrors of the eternal original Light. The pure spirits of the first creation were the first-fruits, as their vestures and abodes were the morning stars, of the day which proceeded from the Father of lights. Then was there darkness in heaven by means of him who himself would shine, and fell into the abyss. Over that abyss Adam was created, concerning whom the Creator's counsel knew beforehand that he, with all his race, would fall into the deceitfulness of darkness; but for whom the eternal will of Love had also beforehand appointed a new and glorious victory of light through redeeming grace. This supreme counsel and will of the Father becomes an accomplished reality in each of the fallen children of Adam, when he receives the gift of grace prepared and proffered to him. This is the wonder of all wonders, the ever-continuous birth of the son of God as the new Adam, of the new man as the son of God, in *us* believers. It takes place in profound secret and mystery: as the light from above sinks down into the darkness, as the sunbeam prepares life in the plant, as every birth of life in this domain of darkness and death is a mystery

of the struggle of the upper influences of the world of light and life with Chaos—so is the new birth of a sinful man into the sonship of God. It is an essential *birth* of life, even as previously there was a birth of death from sin—hence St James uses the same word in both cases. The children of this regeneration are now naturally and in strict right elevated, through a new creation which surpasses the first in glory, to a dignity above the unfallen angels: we are in reality already, and we shall be manifestly in the consummation, *in a certain sense the first-fruits*, the highest and most glorious of all the creatures of God. For the Son, born eternally of the eternal Father, the First-born before every creature, makes us partakers of His Divine nature, even as He has taken upon Himself ours. In Christ, and finally made like unto Him, we receive not merely, like Adam, dominion over the earth; but *all things* are put under the feet of the Son of Man! The heavenly creature bows down before this gift and grace of the Most High; the earthly creation becomes in its deliverance the body and the temple of the *children of God!*

Such superabounding grace hath the Father given and laid up for us *of His own free will*—according to the good pleasure of His counsel, to the praise of His glorious grace, wherein He hath made us acceptable in the Beloved, for our sakes not spared; in whom He freely giveth us *all things*, through the love with which He, rich in mercy, loved us when dead in our sins. It is ever and essentially a *gift* and a *grace*. But not—as many think, who glory in this "*us*" as referring to the elect, darkening the glory of the eternal Father—that this grace before appointed *us* particularly to life, while the rest were left to destruction or appointed to death. God forbid! We were saved by grace, but *through faith*, which received the gift and the grace provided for all. That salvation is the gift of God, but not also in the same sense that faith which the gift requires. But this faith establishes no merit; for even if we believe, we do no more than we are bound to do—and this illustrates the justice of that judgment without mercy which will fall upon those who despise God's mercy. Further, the unbelieving and the lost will not all be finally saved, so that in this sense those who were regenerated in the first period of grace are the first-fruits of the whole: faith is the ground of decision and judgment for all eternity.

Therefore St James appends, as the necessary medium of regeneration, *through the word of truth!* For a *word* is addressed to faith, and must in faith be embraced! The truth is the shining light which saveth us out of the error of darkness —when we follow that light, and love it rather than darkness. The *Word* of God, the eternal Incarnate One, and the Gospel, in which that Word lives and works by the Holy Ghost, is the *seed* of the new birth, if it is *implanted in us* (ver. 21). The word of truth is preached to us; it is written in the Scripture, which is the testimony of the eternal Wisdom against all our error, and concerning Whom it is said—"All the words of Thy mouth are righteous; there is nothing perverse or false in them" (Prov. viii. 8). But this word of God, witnessing or awakening, is met and responded to even now in ourselves by a most secret *word* of truth, which is to be awakened in us,—a glimmering spark of light in the deepest ground of our souls, derived from their first creation. For, how could we acknowledge and receive in faith the truth, without any measure of truth in ourselves through which we could discern it to be truth? Were we altogether *dead*, it would not be *we* who were awakened; not we, who were in the previous state, would be the regenerated. Not till sin is finished is death fully brought forth; now we vibrate and hang between life and death; we can and we may embrace life, and become obedient to the life-giving truth (which still speaks to us, according to Ps. xix., through day and night)! O that *every man*, as he is called, were *swift* to hear this! (ver. 19). He that is so will not *err;* he that so abides, from the time of his first hearing, will finally not go astray from the way which leads to the glorious goal of the first-fruits, the inheritance of the saints in light.

Do *we* no longer err, dear brethren? Has God in truth begotten *us* again to the beginning of a new life? and are we, as children of the Father, faithfully and diligently persevering in the obedience of the truth? Do we not thoughtlessly put from us any good and perfect gift which comes down to us from His light, in order to our growth and perfection? Do we vehemently suppress every error and corruption which may come to our lips and defile our life, as the relics of the old man? The words which now follow put us to the earnest test.

VI.

SWIFT TO HEAR.

(Ch. i. 19.)

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to wrath.

The whole life of every man moves between *hearing* and *speaking;* and this should lead us to infer how comprehensive and far-reaching in its application this saying of St James must be! What inspiration and expiration are to the bodily life, that to the soul is, so to speak, the receiving by the ear and repeating by the lips. But we must breathe wholesome air, if we would live and thrive. Consequently, it is apparent at once *what*, and *how* or *to what end*, we should *hear:* it is obvious that we must altogether abstain from hearing lies and deceptions; that we should not, like the Athenians, be always eager or swift to hear some new thing (Acts xvii. 21), with those who count life a market for gain (Wisd. xv. 12). *Therefore*, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear; that is, as we have already heard, because we through the word of truth are born again into first-fruits of the creatures of God. Thus, this word of regeneration is what we must hear! Thus, further, we should not *merely* hear—as St James afterwards proceeds—but be *doers* of the ingrafted word, not hearers alone! Otherwise, it is not the right *hearing;* but the truth has been heard as if it were not true, or as if the *truth* were not to be carried into *act*. The word of truth brings to us new things and old; and not to overlook the old, as if we had done with it, is of the utmost importance and necessity in our ever-necessary hearing. How often are we appealed to—Know ye not? Consider well what is said! What the text means is fundamentally the same as St Peter's exhortation—Purify your souls in the *obedience of the truth* through the Spirit! (1 Pet. i. 22). This is opposed to that holding of the truth in unrighteousness, to that contentiousness of spirit, which obeys not the truth (Rom. i. 18, ii. 8). As this not-hearing is the universal and original sin of the natural man, so, alas, the temptation to it most easily

occurs to believers; and they must be asked, as the Galatians were —Who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth? (Gal. iii. 1). Something of this bewitchment adheres always to the old man; *therefore* we are *exhorted* (which otherwise would not be needful) *swiftly* and zealously to hear what we are in ourselves *slow* to hear and receive, because we love not to hear it.

The What, the How, and the Wherefore of this required hearing are sufficiently plain; there remains only the question, *When* and *where* should we hear? But the answer—which does not permit the last question, *Who* must hear? to arise, saying already, Let every man!—will, strictly speaking, scarce allow any when or where; for the saying is directed against the evasions of the idle and the wilful, who might say that not now or not here their duty is to hear. St James exhorts us, *always and everywhere to hear, where salutary truth for us to act upon, in order to our regeneration, is to be heard.* If finally in the judgment our actions will decide, before the actions there must necessarily be the *hearing;* hence the Lord says, He that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them! (Matt. vii. 24). How can there be any obedience without previous hearing? and where there is wanting a perfect obedience to the truth which has been long heard and known, is there any better way to amendment than first of all better to hear the ever-returning counsel and exhortation?

But after all these questions, some may still ask, or even make it the first question—*Whom* shall I hear? The answer is plain, beloved brethren: I must hear *God*, who speaks and sends to me the word of truth; rightly to understand, I must assuredly not hear the mere word of man, in as far as it is the word of man, and might therefore be error and delusion. For, it still remains that God alone is true, and every man a liar (Rom. iii. 4). But, on the other hand, if thou shouldst pervert this, and in thy blind pride despise every word which comes to thee through human lips, and refuse to hear until God speak directly to thyself, thou wouldst be again in absolute error. For, although God can, if He will, reveal Himself, as he did to Samuel—Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth!—yet He is pleased especially to speak to man *by men*, as here to the beloved brethren by His servant James. And if every man who knows the truth has that truth committed to him for a testi-

mony, and every brother must exhort and edify every brother, it becomes the duty of all to hear every word to which we are directed by God. If, finally, that we may hold carefully to the text, *every man* is to hear—even if he have no special Divine revelation, no servant of God sent to exhort him, no edifying brethren—we must embrace the widest circle of all that truth which is in the world for the hearing of man. We shall, consequently, then only perfectly expound the words, when we understand that we should be zealous to hear *every salutary word, every word of truth given for our obedience, which God may send to us in any way.* But that truth comes to us in three ways: more immediately and properly as the word of God; more indirectly through the word of man; and, over and above, in all the world, and in the whole of life.

As it respects the first, we mention not at once the new revelation of grace; but previously that *word of truth* which speaks to the natural man in the conscience. Here, as we read before, is found in all men the deepest root and the first beginning of their holding the truth in unrighteousness. O that every man would hear what God speaketh within him! But this most internal, increated word is pressed down by our sin, which suffers it not to become a word spoken to us; it is first awakened, then supplemented and developed by the Holy Spirit. To hear the voice *of the Spirit*, who is a Spirit of truth and grace, is the true essential for us all; if we do not hear the Spirit in the word, we have not heard the word itself. But, further, how does the Spirit speak and declare His presence? By the external word, in which He condescendingly wraps Himself, by which He opens our eyes, so that we may, according to the will of God, mark the presence of the Spirit in it. We must first have heard by a word that there is a Holy Ghost (Acts xix. 2), before we can receive the Spirit as speaking to ourselves. And where is the essential word of the Spirit? In the *Holy Scripture*, and in all of it as inspired by God. Christ, the incarnate eternal Word, stands in the midst of Scripture. Over Him sounds out the heavenly voice—Him shall ye hear! (Matt. xvii. 5). He speaks as no other man speaks, with supreme authority—Verily, I say unto you! But His word is not on that account opposed to that of the Apostles and Prophets, who, before and after Him, testified through His Spirit

concerning Himself. The whole Bible is the firm and certain word, in whose light we see light, in whose teaching we hear and learn the truth, which discloses to us the depths of our own hearts, which paves the way for us to the word of the Lord Himself who is the Spirit. The word of Scripture is at once the key and the seal of every extant word of truth, which the grace of God has provided and given. To what end then given, dear brethren? Do you say—to *read* it, for it is *Scripture?* But I would hold with St James—not so, but to *hear!* Understand this aright. Do you not know, have you not experienced in yourselves, and seen in others, how altogether unfruitful is a certain reading of the Bible? O the melancholy reading without the hearing of the heart! O the dead traffic with the letter, which becomes not a living word! Do we not know those who are for ever reading and learning, without coming to the knowledge of the truth? (2 Tim. iii. 7). These are they who hear not! Therefore said Father Abraham to the man in hell, who cared for his brethren—They have Moses and the Prophets, let them *hear them!* Yes, verily; and thus should we hear the holy men of God, Prophets and Apostles, who, moved by the Holy Ghost, *spake* to us in the Scriptures, as if we had themselves (which then is the truth) in their words. And not only so, we should similarly hear God, speaking by His servants; we should hear Him, if born again by the word of truth, as His children, with childlike attention—even as a pious child gathers into his heart the words of an earthly father.

In order that we may learn and practise this, and that the written word should not remain to us a mere writing, the wisdom of God appointed, before and concurrently with all written Scripture, *oral preaching.* Let us never despise and reject this good and perfect gift of the Father! Be swift to go into the house of God, as you are invited; come always with purpose to hear internally for faith and obedience. What the preacher speaks to you from the word of God, as the word of God, is not given to you to criticise and talk about, but to retain and ponder in your hearts; never for the mere increase of your knowledge, for the heaping up in your mind even of Bible-knowledge, which will condemn you in proportion as it fails to be in you living seed of fruitful works. How often do we preachers address ourselves to our "devout hearers;" but God

knows how few real *hearers* there are among the many who listen to the sermon! How few sit under the pulpit of whom it may be said—And they sate down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words! (Deut. xxxiii. 3). If thou wilt hear and learn to good purpose, hear in every sermon with sincere heart what God in it would say to thee; and what the Holy Spirit, who accompanies the preached word, would say to thy conscience in addition. The genuine hearer of the word in the church holds himself responsible to answer the question of his own heart—What have I now heard for myself? and he goes and becomes a doer of the word which he has heard.

But God gives us, further, besides Scripture and preaching, His salutary word, for our sanctification and blessedness, in the *more mediate words of men*—yea, often, words of men which may prepare the way for the regenerating word of truth. Or are we to listen only to words spoken by those who hold the preacher's office, and reverently receive no other words as the word of God for obedience? Yet every man has through life others over or by his side who are to him invested with the honour and office of God's representatives—parents and masters, according to the Decalogue. Hence we are all bound to *hear* from childhood to the very end of life. But, that we may not stretch the text beyond its meaning, this requires not so much the *obeying*, as the earnest attention to every good and true word which God may thus send to us. But we should show ourselves all the more swift to hear, when they who speak to us speak officially to us as appointed by God. Children should hear the word of their parents, and of all who stand in their place, their teachers and guardians; servants should hear the words of their masters; subjects should attend to the commands of those over them—it always being understood that what is said is said from the truth. What endless abundance of wholesome and good words has God's grace provided for us through life to hear! If thou actually hearest in all these relations, according to St James' meaning,—although it may be asked, Who has done all this as he should?—hast thou fulfilled all thine obligation to hear? By no means, and it would be most perverse and mischievous to think that we have nothing to do but to hear those human words which are spoken by those who have a special Divine appointment over us! So thought

that ungodly Israelite when he repelled the interference of Moses—Who made thee a judge or a ruler over us? (Ex. ii. 14). That is the very language of the refractory, who reject the truth of God instead of obeying it. Is it not a service of love to thy soul to say the saving truth which concerns thee? Does not that come also from God, and therefore demand to be received in His name? When, therefore, thy friend counsels and teaches thee, spurn not the message and gift of God by him! But who is thy friend? Not only he to whom thy caprice assigns the name and specific rights of a friend; but, if thou wouldst be called a child of God, every other child of God, every brother in Christ. When he thus in brotherly wise speaks to thee, he is thy pastor, sent of God in that particular; even as thy pastor, to whom thou givest this title, comes to thee with his counsel as a brother. Dost thou desire that thy brother should hear thee—and who is without that desire?—then do the same to him. If thy brother has anything against thee, should he conceal his angry feeling in his heart, and count thee unworthy of brotherly converse, and thus make himself partaker of thy guilt? And yet how unfrequent even among Christians is the sentiment of David the king, who, bowing down before every man, said—Let the righteous smite me in kindness, and rebuke me; it shall be a balsam, from which it shall not turn away! (Ps. cxli. 5).

Still further, dear brethren! Dare I ever say to any man—However true and good may be that which thou sayest to me, I have no need to hear it, for thou art not a brother? We have only to utter this aloud in the hearing of God, to feel its injustice and wrong. St James, in fact, means no less than if he had said—Let every man be swift to hear *every man*. As the child should hear the wiser and more experienced word of every adult, the ignorant the instruction of every one who knows better, the younger every older child; as the ungodly should hear every pious and righteous man, every one taught of God who might instruct them,—so should the godless hear even every good and true word which even the companion of his godlessness may speak to him; and much more should the righteous hear every man who has a word of truth for him, even if the speaker be one of the ungodly! So much the more, so much the more willingly and humbly should he hear, because he would be a righteous man, and yet remains only *a man*.

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Whenever and whencesoever truth comes to me, the truth which I need, it comes to me from God; and I should listen to the truth, because the opposite would be sin, and lead to yet greater sin. Remember this ever, and you will find that even a child may have unconsciously a word from God to say to the highest saints. Those who are true, sincere, and humble saints, will receive with loyalty and obedience every such word coming from the throne of their King. No Christian who would learn on till he has learned all, and is perfect as his Master, asks, when a good word reaches his ear and heart, for the hand and seal of the sender, or as to *who* says it; his question is always and only as to *what* is said. He does not even ask very anxiously as to the *how* it may have been said. It is of small concernment to me whether that which I ought to hear in righteousness, and may hear in grace, has been addressed directly to myself by him who speaks—if only the Holy Ghost directs it to my soul. When another by my side receives a rebuke, and the rebuke is equally suitable to me, I should regard it as addressed also to myself. Through the whole of life the rule holds good which applies to the sermon—If I am struck, I am aimed at! So can the hearer make useful to his own soul all that scattered, unavowed, and carelessly tossed about truth, of which there is incalculably more to be found in the world than the deaf and the blind observe; so may the Christian come out of a frivolous assembly, which he could not avoid entering, bringing away many good things for himself. Whether he who teaches or rebukes me be a righteous or unrighteous man, whether the brother acknowledge and obey the truth which comes from his lips or not, whether he strikes me in kindness or with a bitter Raca—does not affect the truth which it is for me to hear and act upon. Woe to those who think themselves righteous, and have not yet learned that the pious may learn to advantage from the evil world, and the servant of God may derive profit from his enemies.

As has been said, there is truth enough, there are words of truth scattered everywhere, if they could only find the right hearers! The word of truth and of wisdom from above resounds by no means only in the sanctuary; they may be heard also in the streets: learn only to hear and distinguish them! So may the watchman, though drunk himself, while he exhorts thee to

sobriety and watchfulness, teach thee a good lesson when he cries aloud the time which hastens to eternity. So may the stroke of the inanimate bell be as the crowing of the cock to thee when sharing Simon Peter's carelessness. All time is full, full of monitions of eternity; the whole world of the creatures is full of references to God the Creator.

Therefore we said at the outset that, finally, there is something for us to hear in all the world and in the whole of life. The simple and wise saying of St James is so inexhaustible, that it embraces the whole world, and points to every truth worth hearing extant in the world; or, are we to suppose, with the exaggerated Pietists, that he proscribed and rejected as vanity and lie all that did not immediately spring from the final and full grace of Christ? The grace and truth of God never from the beginning utterly left the world and mankind; never left itself without a witness. "For the Spirit of the Lord filleth the world" (Wisd. i. 7). Without words, He speaks still in the creature, even as in its first revelation. The heavens declare the glory of God; and here below upon earth one day showeth forth to another, one night to another—the great, wordless but loud, concealed and yet manifest, mystery. Had not men unlearned the understanding of this speech, there would have been no heathens. But are we Christians past the necessity of hearing that voice, as if it were the alphabet which, as children, we have left behind? God forbid! As the New Testament fulfils to us and consummates and opens the Old, so Revelation generally leads us back into the understanding of the creation. Now first can we read again the secret writing, now first hear the Divine words in things inanimate. As the parables of our Lord Jesus disclose the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven in figures which have existed from the beginning of the world, so have we everywhere around us, if our minds are open to receive it, a most impressive language of God. How many are there who, saturated with the Bible, but not soundly instructed in it, scorn this teaching; but would, nevertheless, be delivered from many delusions and errors, if they would begin rightly to *hear this voice!*

Further, O every man, before thou hearest anything beyond, is not *thine own life* full of God's words to thee? How much of the intervention of Providence is there, even in the midst of all thy appointments for thyself; how much wholesome teaching,

discipline, invitation, and warning? All good gifts preach—Give thanks to God! All evil preaches—Sin is the soul's ruin! All punishments and judgments, the evil consequences of evil, cry aloud—He that will not hear, must feel! The child's burnt finger asks—Why didst thou not listen when forbidden to touch? This is a thousand times repeated in life, from the smallest to the greatest things; and so, on the other hand, are the endless testimonies of the good which we receive. Men, listen to your own experiences; and not merely to your own, let the experience of all the world be turned to your own advantage. Examples everywhere speak loudly in your neighbours; mighty is the preaching of the history of God's kingdom and of the world. Narrow-minded Christians neglect history, to their hurt: the good gift of the word of truth must by all His children be received whenever their Father points them to it. Much error, delusion, and prejudice, would retire, if they were willing and swift to hear the voice of God's providence, in the world and the Church, crying—Do ye not perceive and know that thus and thus I deal with the children of men? O that we were not so *slow* to hear, so dull of apprehension, so soon weary of learning! *To hear and to learn* is the first step to the knowledge of the truth and regeneration; but hearing and learning is also the unchanging way to the goal of our consummation. On the edge of the grave awaits us the last word, which we must hear to our final perfection. This is the wisdom from above, that we cease not *to be easy to be entreated* from above (Jas. iii. 17). To those who hear, the precious promise is given—"Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it; neither to the right hand nor to the left" (Is. xxx. 21). Thus did Christ, the Son of God in our humanity, hear of the Father, in the way of faith and obedience, what He spake to the world; thus He delivered to us the truth which He received of the Father (John viii. 26, 40). Let us through His grace imitate Him in this; let us every morning open our ears, that we may hear like the disciples, and not be disobedient or go back:—then will the Lord give to *us* also the tongue of the learned, that we should know how to *speak* a word in season (Is. l. 4, 5). Then shall we *not* speak what comes, swiftly enough, from the evil or erring heart to the tongue, and is profitable neither to ourselves nor to our brethren.

VII.

BUT SLOW TO SPEAK.

(Ch. i. 19.)

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to wrath.

Not only the *brother*, the partaker of a heavenly calling, whose ear has been opened to the perception of the word of truth, who now knows the gift of God, and *Who* it is that *speaketh to him*—not only the believer in God and Christ,—should hear, but *every man* whose ear the Father will yet open, to whom and in whom the Father's word is also speaking, for the purpose of winning him through hearing to faith. But, on the other hand, the believer must not suppose that only others are bound to hear—as if he had himself already heard all! Against this more or less consciously presumptuous and sinful inertness to hear, St James enforces the keen exhortation, "*swift* to hear;" for, some salutary teaching may easily be neglected, and we may remain wanting in some gift of God sent down to us in vain!

But, on the other hand, *slow to speak!* In grace the order of nature is inverted: by nature every man is slow to hear, and —alas, much too swift to speak. The wheel or course of nature, urged by the internal fire of the inborn character, as St James afterwards (ch. iii. 6) profoundly says, drives in restless swiftness especially the tongue of the natural man: the tongue is the unruly evil, full of deadly poison out of the fountain of corruption within us; no man can tame it (ch. iii. 8–11). But by the grace of God it is tamed and bound; consequently, every man who stands and lives in grace, who serves God in new obedience, should hold his tongue in check, should vigilantly guard against the evil which may overflow from the remains of the old *man* in him. To this belongs the evil and bitter *wrath* of man, the opposite of the holy love of God; but, as St James introduces this in a separate clause, we will reserve it for another discourse, and ponder now the fruitful words—*but slow to speak!* Because, through the deceitfulness of Satan, we have not stood in

the truth, but fallen into the lie, into the self-sufficiency and rebellion which will maintain *its own* word,—all *our own* words *contradict* and thwart the wholesome hearing of the word from above; in order, therefore, rightly to hear, we must cease to speak and keep silence. Thus St Peter repeats for the New Testament the ancient words of David: "He that will love life, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile" (1 Pet. iii. 10)—that his own tongue may not continually speak guile to, and deceive, his own heart (Jas. i. 26). "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue," says the Wisdom of Solomon, "keepeth his soul from trouble:" "he that keepeth his tongue keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction:" "death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat of the fruit thereof" (Prov. xxi. 13, xiii. 3, xviii. 21).

Let us endeavour now thoroughly to investigate in order what kinds of evil and dangerous speaking men are liable to, unless they give strict heed. The first and the worst is obviously that direct *contradiction* of the truth of God, the tendency to which is in us all,—implanted in our hearts by him who was a liar from the beginning. So at the first the serpent spoke, when the first word of scruple, *Yea, hath God said?* was more daringly continued, *That which God said is not true; ye shall not surely die the death!* From that time men have consented to the liar's words in their own hearts; and all who love and hold fast that lie fall into ruin. Such are those whom the Epistle to the Romans calls *contentious*, that is, who contend with God, and obey not the truth (Rom. ii. 8).

This *spirit of contradiction* in our evil nature begins from earliest childhood to rise against the authority of those set over us in the place of God. Mark how prompt the little ones are to learn and speak out the *No:* that should never be regarded by us as a trifling thing, or as the innocent awakening of independence, but as the early expression of a deep corruption. And when they are obliged to hear—these weak and silly children—when their No does not succeed, and they know it, with all kinds of *questioning why* they interfere and protest, before they hear and obey. From these self-wise children, if they do not learn God's wisdom, the grown-up people spring, who are never in heart subject to God, but always and in all things have some

controversy with the law of duty:—the *gainsaying*, answering again, servants and maidens (Tit. ii. 9); the *reasoning* subjects, who, at least with their tongues, fight against law and government, and would carry their lawlessness so far that at length no man must say to any man anything in the name of God, or in His name utter any command. All will govern and teach themselves. And yet we see very plainly what comes of all this speaking: every man will be in the right; every one *opposes* in the spirit of selfishness and insurrection.

The same spirit of contradiction proceeds to the utterance of the tongue—only still more bold and free, as if we all had the greatest right—against other men generally, if they have anything to say to us. O how *swift* we are to retort and give the answer back, whenever we are instructed and reproved! How do we fence ourselves with stiffnecked folly against receiving the good and gentle word! We have a thousandfold repulsion ready: They are not right, and we know better! or, What concerns it them, and why should they take upon themselves to instruct? We are swift to oppose our neighbour with the word of that Israelite to Moses—Intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? (Ex. ii. 14)—as if that could alter the truth of the word spoken, and invalidate our duty to obey it! Ye men who so resolutely will have the last word one against the other, think of the judgment in which God will maintain the last word against all; when it will be said of the eternal amazement of so many—*But he was speechless!* Are ye so bold as to resist with uttered words the word of God Himself, the Scripture and the preaching sent of God? That is the sad sin over which the faithful, longsuffering God now laments—All day long I stretched out Mine hands to a disobedient and *gainsaying* people! (Rom. x. 21). So the Son of God, through whom the Father spoke at the last, experienced and endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself (Heb. xii. 3);—the Gospel of St John gives us many examples. Thus is it ever in His Christendom, from the daring contradiction of open unbelief down to the disguised and unobeying infidelity of those who yet say that they believe in Him. Christians, who would learn in order to the knowledge of the truth, be on your guard against *disputing*, which leads not to that knowledge; against the zeal of dogmatising, which, instead of listening to the word of another,

is only thinking what to reply! Take heed that you resort not to repelling artifices, contradicting and complaining, when you receive exhortation; lest, when your conscience is forced to admit the truth, your tongue be too ready on that very account to contradict! Guard against the disposition, thence springing and thither leading, to speak against the salutary dealings of God by which He speaks to you in your life! The slightest touch of contradiction often provokes the full bitterness of rebellion; but it is His design, not to vex the soul, but to make it humble and silent.

When we no longer withstand the truth which comes to us, we often have at least *apologies* and *evasions:* this is another kind of naughty speaking, when we should humbly and sincerely hear. Thus Adam began in Paradise, and it still goes on; St James has already spoken of it in ver. 13. *After* the sin we are not guilty in the judgment, but in the end rather the Lord who judgeth us: we were deceived, misled, forced, and could not do otherwise; circumstances led us into it; it was our weakness, conjoined with a wicked world and hot temptation. Of all this we speak not here; but refer, on the other hand, to the cunning readiness with which, *before* the word which would condemn our sin, we anticipate it by shifts and evasions which are really based upon a secret rejection of the judgment of truth. In this the natural man has learned skill from the craft of Satan. Hence arises nearly all the perversion of Scripture, which only aims to turn it away from our conscience and heart; the perverse exposition of the commandment, that it may not condemn us, as the Sermon on the Mount teaches; the question, Who is my neighbour? and so forth. We have but to read the whole Epistle to the Romans, and mark how *the man*, with whom the Apostle has to do, interjects his evasions and demurs, until he utters at last the bold, *Why doth He yet find fault?* (Rom. ix. 19). Now, the clear word of God is not plain enough, so that we have much to say about it at first; then the simple and clear exposition must be forced, for we believe that the letter is not to be so literally pressed; now, we bring something that we have found, but only that we may not be found ourselves as simple hearers. And, as with God's immediate word, so also we deal with every word of man which condemns us for God's sake and the truth's;

we are always too swift to *justify ourselves* instead of receiving condemnation, to maintain our own superior *knowledge* rather than receive instruction.

On that very account we are so swift with our impertinent and officious *judgment* of others, in which we forget ourselves: a new and most fruitful domain of the *speaking* here condemned! Before we rightly understand anything, we have our opinion ready; before we have received the word thoroughly to our own amendment, we carry it round for the instruction and amendment of others. ⌜We would, in our heart's cunning, appear to be what we are not; and the most obvious help to this counterfeiting is the wise word with which we exalt ourselves over our neighbour.⌟ Therefore, everything that *happens* falls under our ready comment, so that every man has a daily news-sheet upon his tongue; we are masters of the world's course, have a word of judgment for everything that occurs; as if that which God permits our eyes to see and our ears to hear for our instruction, was permitted rather that we might deliver our thoughts upon it! We are, further, self-appointed judges of all that *is done* by others; we forget altogether that we should learn from it lessons for ourselves, and prefer to pour forth our foolish comments of wisdom. We know how this man or that might have done better, how we would have done it in his place; without knowing that we might instead have done much worse. O the mischief of this judging, criticising, whispering, backbiting, gossiping about every event in the world, and every action of the men around us! Against this Sirach's son cries out—"What God hath commanded thee, think thereupon with diligence: Be not curious in things which are not in thy office; for more things are showed thee than thou canst settle" (Ecclus. iii. 22, 23). ⌜If our judgment is right, all the more unright is it that we should turn into a mere external thing, to be talked about, that teaching and truth which is given us for our silent hearing and profit—placing the speaking precisely in the place of hearing.⌟ ⌜Every man would be a teacher, few suffer themselves to be taught. This is too much and too long the failing of Christians, much more so than they are generally willing to admit or condemn in themselves.⌟ Is not this with many the first sign, though not the right one, of their having apprehended a truth, that they are at once anxious to inculcate it upon others? ⌜The faithful

pastor, whose object it is to bring his people rightly to hear, finds this among his great troubles, that their swift tongues come so much into collision with his teaching and exhortation; how often it is needful that he should remind those whom he visits in their sickness or otherwise—I am not come that we may discourse together as being both wise, but that I may say to you some spiritual truth that you need! How many Christians will hold to it, that God's word is matter about which people must talk together—God's word, which always should directly speak to our hearts! Dear brethren, examine yourselves by this and all that has been already said, and see whether this evil clings to yourselves. Guard against the so much loved "pious conversations," which are often so unprofitable, which are often no more than mere babblings and idle talk! Do not *talk away* from your hearts the power and the blessing of saving truth! Miserable is it that the grand and weighty words of the Bible—sin, grace, repentance, faith, sanctification, prayer—and the most piercing and the most instructive of its sayings, so swiftly glide over our tongues. And how easily and unprofitably the name of God springs to our lips! Luther says: "The devil is a knave, and has no objection that the name of the Lord should be on people's tongues, if he himself lies under them."

Similarly, we speak quite enough about earthly things; and that is a kind of speaking against which we should be on our guard. It may seem to be at least indifferent; but as being mere *speaking* it is evil, for it takes the place of hearing. He that speaks cannot, at the time that he is speaking, hear. But how little pleasure, and how little practice, in the art of holy silence is there even in the Christian world; how little stillness of heart for that always necessary silence, when foolish custom requires the conversation to be kept up without pause in every company! Can that be good; and is it necessary that it should be so? In how many companies would every one have the word, but no one receive it; and when all is over, and the guests go home, what have they got from the whole, as men even for time, and as Christians for eternity? This they have gotten, that it may be said of them, They bring their years to an end as a *tale that is told!* (Ps. xc. 9). But living and dying is too solemn for any hour to be spent in idle tales, which might be my last hour. Even if thou sayest, I speak nothing that is evil! it is bad enough

to say that. Very seldom wilt thou be able to say that; for he who speaks often and much will hardly fail to intermingle foolish words. But, were it not so, thou shouldst speak what is *good*, thou shouldst hear what is *good;* for that thou livest thy years, and days, and hours. This the foolish talkers know full well in their consciences; their idle talk is not so innocent as it appears; they talk so vehemently, in many cases, simply to prevent the good word from coming home to themselves; they go up and down the trifling world only that they may avoid entering into themselves. To speak gently as possible, many remain their life long like little children who would show that they can speak, and think aloud. And is that seemly for adult men, or children of God? And what trivialities are often the unworthy matter of our converse! Again, how do the greatest, most important, matters run through the foolish babbling, without having the ear of the heart opened to hear them! The Creator gave us two ears and one mouth—we all know why, as the proverb says. "Women hear not, and will not be talked to," is a common saying. And why not? Because they themselves have always so much to say. But there are men enough who need the apostolical warning—Let no corrupt conversation proceed out of your mouth! Let no man deceive you with *vain words;* for because of *these things* the wrath of God cometh upon the *children of disobedience.* Therefore be ye not partakers with them (Eph. iv. 29, v. 6, 7). By these words are meant also all that empty babbling which dissipates the thoughts, which makes a man to shut out the Holy Spirit and the voice of God in the conscience. There are many diligent church-goers, who after the Divine service industriously chatter away the effect of what they have heard, and lose all the benefit of the holy day which they desecrate, instead of going into secret to recall the words which they have received into their hearts, and to supplicate the presence and blessing of God to confirm His words. Idle talking, therefore, is not merely a misuse of the tongue, but it squanders the season of grace, hinders the hearing that might be salutary, and robs the good word of truth of its rights and influence. This is most manifest in the tumultuous life of the ungodly, who are miserable when reduced to stillness. As the soldiers march over the battle-field with sound of fife and drum to drown the complaining sighs of the dying, so do these ungodly make loud noise that they may

drown the gentle word of lamentation—Thou art destroying thyself! Thou art passing over the field of thine own slaughter! If a man must go away from home to find contentment, it is a sign that he is secretly unhappy. He can have no peace in his own heart who must always live abroad, and for ever lets his thoughts roam at the command of his tongue over all the earth. Those who are truly and fundamentally awakened *become quiet:* that is the first sure sign that they have begun to hear the word from above. Be not hasty with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be rash to speak anything *before God;* for God is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few (Eccles. v. 1). He who feels this, and begins to hear, ceases to speak; but, on the other hand, that he may hear, he must refrain from speaking. He that begins to hear must become silent; but it is only the first hearing of God's voice which silences our own incessant speaking.

But the incessant speaking of men may be thought an exaggeration. No man is continually speaking, it may be said. But if we look into the deepest meaning of St James' word, we shall note that all the improper speaking with which we have been dealing may have an *internal* existence. It is with the speaking as with the hearing. As the conscience gives testimony within our hearts by accusing thoughts, and the Spirit in our conscience by convincing or instructing word, so also in our hearts arise the *excusing* thoughts and words, the contradictions of the rebellious spirit. Every man carries on, as long as he lives, an inward colloquy with himself. Many seem outwardly still, but within there is the roar of the market-place; thoughts and images in tumultuous confusion, which utterly prevent them from hearing what God may directly or indirectly speak to their hearts. And does not that evil still adhere to our nature, beloved brethren? The talking of the inner babbler accompanies and persecutes us even under the pulpit, when we read the Scriptures, when we are engaged in prayer, to prevent if possible our hearing the word or the answer of God! O let us notwithstanding *hear*, let us eagerly *hearken*, that we may press forward to *obey!* Let us stifle all vain babbling within by the rational word of Zophar the Naamathite—Should not the multitude of words be answered? (Job xi. 2).

Then, when we have heard, fundamentally heard, may we

not *speak?* Assuredly; for St James exhorts us only to be *slow* and prudent to speak; he would not impose silence upon us, as Pythagoras did upon his disciples; he would not make Trappists or Carthusians of us, whose tongues can only utter *memento mori.* But what we speak should come from the truth which we have learned, from the wisdom which we have received, to the honour of God, and to the profit of our neighbour. "The lips of talkers will be telling such things as pertain not unto them: but such as have understanding weigh their words in a balance. The heart of fools is in their mouth: but the mouth of the wise is in their heart" (Ecclus. xxi. 25 26). The tongue also is a member which we should consecrate to the service of righteousness, truth, and love. Let him that hath spoken evil and false, do so no more; but rather let him get something good by hearing, that he may have to give to him that needeth—something good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers (Eph. iv. 28, 29). O how needful is edification; and how do God's poor people hunger for the bread of God, of which man liveth! Should we not always be ready to place before them what God hath given to us? We should assuredly not merely be always ready with an answer, when the reason of our faith is demanded (1 Pet. iii. 15); we should also, as the Lord's disciples, make His word our own —I will preach righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I will not refrain my lips! (Ps. xl. 9).

But then we must be *slow* to speak, prudent and not precipitate, even in the words of an earnest testimony, instruction, and exhortation! Let us see to it that we rightly hit the Where and the When, and not cast our pearls before swine. Let us avoid the *many* words, which are not profitable either in preaching or in prayer, either in brotherly exhortation or in teaching. *One* word, spoken in its season, is like an apple of gold in a frame of silver (Prov. xxv. 11)—it is of more worth and efficiency than a hundred others. "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword," though he may mean to utter words of true wisdom; "but the tongue of the wise is health" (Prov. xii. 18, xxvi. 9). A *wholesome* tongue is a tree of life (Prov. xv. 4), and bears its precious fruit; but that must always be a *slow* and prudent tongue. Therefore, to end all, not *swift* to speak, and fill the Christian world with words with

out power and fruit, of which it has a superfluity already; but in all our speaking, as well as in all our actions, study to be profitable to others and to ourselves, to bear testimony to the truth, and to advance the work of righteousness in love.

VIII.

SLOW TO WRATH.

(Ch. i. 19, 20.)

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to wrath. For the wrath of man worketh not that which is right before God.

Of all the sins which flow from inconsiderate and unbridled swiftness to speak, and which are the outbursts of our natural corruption, St James singles out and makes solemnly prominent one as the chief—that is, *wrath*. But it strikes us at once that, even as he does not absolutely forbid all speaking, so his warning only says—*slow* to wrath! And rightly so; for how could he absolutely denounce all wrath, when there must necessarily be a good and holy indignation? Such is, first of all, the wrath of God, spoken of throughout His word, and attested in act by all His government of the world and His kingdom: from the time that the wrath of God was first revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. i. 18), down to the great day of His wrath, which is also called the wrath of the Lamb, when nothing but the cup of His wrath shall be given, and the great wine-press of the wrath of God shall be trodden (Rev. vi. 16, 17, xiv. 10, 19). In opposition to this St James places manifestly the wrath *of men*, ungodly and unjustifiable, which springs from the loveless nature of man; but he at the same time presupposes that a man of God may, in the Spirit and the name of God, entertain a just and proper wrath. Therefore, in respect to the wrath, as in respect to the speaking, he makes a distinction; and requires that we be slow and cautious, lest we miss in this matter the line of recti-

tude. For, there certainly is a *good* wrath and zeal; but there is a *manifestly evil* wrath, and also that which is only *seemingly good.*

We all know, through ourselves and others, by experience and observation, what is an evidently *wicked wrath.* This rises in the unrighteous man when the truth is spoken to him which he will not hear and accept; when this good gift is sent down to him by God, the evil man within him rages, shows its malignity, and pours out its rash contradiction. This wicked wrath may spring also from his self-complacency, when his beloved self is wounded, though the injury may be but slight. Against all at once Moses speaks, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him; thou shalt not avenge, nor bear grudge" (Lev. xix. 17, 18);—and we Christians know the like words of our Master, Lawgiver, and Judge, "Whosoever is angry with his brother (without a cause,) shall be in danger of the judgment!" (Matt. v. 22). *Thou,* sinful man, as such hast no right to judge and avenge; for, thy neighbour's sin does *thee* no wrong, thy equal sin has long ago deserved all this and more. And even when thy proud and bitter wrath finds vent only in words of reproach, the text speaks of them as an act. The wrath of man *worketh* not that which is right before God: that is, at the outset, the words are before God equivalent to acts, for they proceed from the heart and its evil treasure like the works; they are also fruits by which the tree is known, and on the ground of which the judgment of the last day will be pronounced. It is thus that God sees and judges: He does not regard (like foolish men generally) the evil effect or hurt which has resulted or may result from a wicked word, but the spirit from which it springs and to which it bears witness. If the blinded king-slayer had, like Shimei, reviled the Lord's Anointed before the people with his tongue, instead of madly seizing the weapons of death which God turned aside, it might have been even worse iniquity and heavier guilt. There are poisonous words of calculated malice which may outweigh in their malignant effects many a malicious act. There are slanders which are among the bitterest fruits of the corrupt tree. There may be a persistent injury and wrong done to an enemy by words alone, in the very spirit and manner of the devil. So there is a blasphemy against

the known truth of God which, as the sin against the Holy Ghost, becomes unpardonable.

But if the word of wrath *doeth* unrighteousness, it also *worketh* unrighteousness, as far as in it lies; and this is further the meaning of St James. Afterwards in ch. iii. he will teach us most impressively the power and significance of words; and show, what we now only hint at by anticipation, that throughout the history of the world the tongue hath done great things, and that good or evil words work righteousness or unrighteousness like widespreading acts. The word is a fruit whose seed is in itself; and who can apprehend or describe the secret influence which in this or in that direction, and sooner or later, that seed may grow to? One word gives occasion for another, reviling leads to counter-reviling—as we know full well. Finally, when we begin to give our wrath free course upon our lips, it soon grows impatient of that limit and takes to itself hands and feet, becoming an accomplished *act*. It is vain to say—I only spoke and did nothing. On the contrary, our confession must too often be—I meant only to speak, but in my wrath I have thus and thus done! The wrathful man loses the dominion over himself, being blinded and possessed by passion; he is beyond the restraint of thought, hears and sees nothing, and his rage rages like a fire of hell, which indeed it is. Ten thousand examples show into what abysses this may cast a man. Therefore St James does not say, Man in his wrath;—but, *The wrath of man*, when it hurries him away, after the reins have been given to his tongue,—worketh that which is not right before God. "For wrath killeth the foolish man, and indignation slayeth the silly one" (Job v. 2). "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression" (Prov. xxix. 22). The life of every man, and the history of every house, gives examples enough; be warned therefore, lest this happen to thee; be on thy guard against thine anger, for thou art but a man, in whom this poison exists. Alas! it is so, though it should not be. For what is *man*, a sinner, and miserable, that he should rise up *before God*, under whose mercy he lives and breathes, and dare to be transported into wrath? But this unholy passion is so deeply interwoven in man's nature, that we seek in vain the saint in whom the danger of its excess is utterly quenched.

But the most perverse and wicked wrath of man rises

against God, against *that* which is in the sight of God right, especially against the well-merited, wholesome punishment and discipline which comes from the hand of God. O that *we* at least, dear *brethren*, might be made free from that wrath, through grace in the obedience of the truth! O that we may learn to receive meekly, as from God, what righteously is our due! Tobit murmured not against God when he lost his sight, but gave alms, and increased in the fear of the Lord, and praised Him (Tob. xiv. 2). Of how few may that be said in their calamities! To how many is the Lord's word to Jonah appropriate, when things go not after their will—Doest thou well to be angry about the gourd? Even Jonah the Prophet said in blind anger to the Lord—I do well to be angry even unto death! (Jon. iv. 9). Take heed to avoid such wrath and rashness, which would be laughable were it ever right to laugh at sin. Become not like the ungodly and the fools, who when God Himself has set something in opposition to their self-will, revenge it upon all that come too near to them. Or, has a man actually done you injustice? Even then, let not others suffer for your wrath; and let not the offender himself; restrain your wrath, which in you is an equal offence. Whatever right you may have in the quarrel, no sinful man has a right to be angry and avenge himself. "Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. xii. 19). To suffer unjustly is better than to act unjustly; but your wrath always worketh unrighteousness, because it is an invasion of God's prerogative, and you can never safely apply the standard of right and of wrong for yourself. Revile not again, therefore, when reviled; rule your wrath in meekness and patience, according to the Spirit of the Lord; speak not in wrath; at least *act* not in any such manner as your returning self-possession would repent of. This is the meaning of the Apostle's word taken from the Psalms—*Be ye angry, and sin not!* in which he allows a holy indignation, but adds, with reference to the evil—Let not the sun go down upon *your* wrath (Eph. iv. 26). That slowly digested anger, fed through days and nights, ripened in silent plans,—how wilful and how fearful is its sinfulness! But also the *sudden* wrath, which hurries a man away, is no less sin; and God will never allow the foolish and daring ex-

cuse—"I was made to sin by others. My anger spoke and acted, and not myself!" O wicked man, who could make thee wicked if thou wert not wicked; and is not thy anger thy own, the wrath of man?

No—you may say in some cases—it is God's wrath which I would exhibit. Do you suppose so? Be very sure that you are right, and beware of a *seemingly holy wrath!* Alas! this latter so easily and so perilously allies itself with unholy wrath, that the keenest test will be needful. Unholy wrath almost always says, in its blindness—"I only desire what is *right;* I am in the right, and I act right!" Is it really only right, O *man?* Really so, before *God?* Wouldst thou with hatred in thine heart become a servant of the righteousness of eternal love? There are a hundred chances against one that it is merely the lie, the self-deception of unholy wrath, which is always right until the wrong glaringly appear. Take heed, and guard against this with cautious care! If it was another who excited your wrath, that is not your justification, but rather enhances your guilt; for you should not return evil for evil, but overcome evil with good. Your gentleness should resist the wrath which is in the world, as a barrier set against it. "A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. xv. 1). "If thou blow the spark, it shall burn: if thou spit upon it, it shall be quenched; and both these come out of thy mouth" (Ecclus. xxviii. 12). If you would really quench the wicked fire which is in the world, overcome its evil and save it from its sin, see to it that you do it prudently. "But that is my endeavour; this is the reason of my sacred zeal before God, that I may do what is right!" Well, if it is to *do what is right;* but be diligent to test your spirit, lest something else mingles with your purpose! If any human wrath be mixed up with it, this will pervert your intention; and how can you then effect what is right? As long as this is to be feared, cease from your doubtful zeal! "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers; neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity" (Ps. xxxvii. 1). Probably it may be with you as with David, who was exceedingly angry with the man who had done such evil, and said in the name of the Lord, "As God liveth, the man is a son of death"—and the Lord said to him, "Thou art the man!" (2 Sam. xii. 5–7). And even were it not so,

thou art at least *not* the man, uncalled and unbidden, to execute right.

And now comes in the literal, exact translation of the text, in which the sentence brings out its full meaning—The *wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* That in your apparently good intention you would accomplish; but you will not, you cannot, effect it by anger. In truth, there may be right in your object, though unright in the manner; you may be aiming at a good end, though in a spirit not in accordance with that end. Your anger will never subserve the cause of righteousness, either in yourself or in others. Evil can never be overcome but by good; this good, however, is *love.* Where zeal is not actuated by the pure and genuine love which comes from God, it increases the evil, instead of mending it; for wrath kindles wrath, nature answers nature, darkness can kindle no light in darkness. Hence, it is written, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath!" (Eph. vi. 4); and that is a word of counsel for all rulers and teachers, for all whose business or desire it is to bring men to God, and instruct them in the way of godliness. O that our blind *zealots* in state, and church, and school, would think of this! "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work;" no good results can follow the contention of human passion in the cause of righteousness. "For the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (Jas. iii. 16, 18). "He that hath knowledge measureth out his words: and a man of understanding is of a composed spirit" (Prov. xvii. 27). But there is no thoughtful understanding in false zeal; and how can it work the righteousness of God? Impatience cannot accomplish that which must be the ripe and waited-for fruit of the seed that was sown. No concerns are furthered by passion and haste; least of all the things of God, which demand deep wisdom and long patience.

Therefore, *slow* to wrath, beloved brethren! Carefully and thoughtfully testing your motives and emotions, in order that there may be no precipitation, either in manifestly or in seemingly justifiable wrath. Let your first care be always to distinguish between the true and the spurious in your indignant sentiments. Commune with your own heart and be still before God, that ye may be able to indulge anger without sin (Ps. iv. 4).

For there certainly is a *good and holy wrath of zeal.* Such is the sacred wrath *of God,* which we must suffer to do its work, a work that He can do without us. That is the proper *wrath* to which we are to *give place,* according to the Apostle's word (Rom. xii. 9). God avenges and punishes; He worketh *righteousness;* although proud and revengeful man would contend against the right of the Supreme to wrath and judgment. But God is and must ever be Love even in wrath; and His wisdom knows the right way, His government uses the right means, to oppose His own efficient righteousness to the unrighteousness of men. He will and He must finally judge those who will not submit to correction, with a wrath which in this period of grace is yet and ever to come. But, from the time that sin existed, the indignation of His zeal has never ceased to burn against it. Behold His Fatherly goodness in His good gifts from above, but also His wrath in the many judgments and visitations of the mighty hand of God. How often does His angry discipline produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness, so that His people can say—I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou wast angry with me, and that Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me. Behold, God is my salvation, and my strength, and my psalm! (Is. xii. 1, 2). His zeal is ever faithful to destroy the works of the devil, to root out evil weeds and plant righteousness and salvation; but mark how *slow* is the wrath and judgment of God, and in its slowness how effectual!

From *Him* we should learn how rightly to be angry; for *by us,* as His instruments, He will work out His righteousness: in the way, however, of love, gentleness, patience; yet in the form of wrath, as He Himself does. The strength and zeal of love is in wrath, holy wrath. The man who is incapable of being thus angry, is incapable of deeply and divinely loving. If you would *work* as God's servants for the righteousness of His kingdom, you must know how to be zealous and angry: to learn and practise this is as necessary to men of God as to learn and practise gentleness and patience; both consist together, and one is the test of the other. Mark how Moses at last went out from Pharaoh's presence in the vehemence of wrath (Ex. xi. 8)—how Jonathan arose from his father's table in fierce wrath, for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame (1 Sam. xx. 34)—how king David was very wroth when he

heard of the sins of his son (2 Sam. xiii. 21)—how everywhere we find holy men of God angry and full of zeal. "Elias the prophet stood up like fire, and his word burned as a lamp" (Ecclus. xlviii. 1)—the Baptist rebuked in his spirit, and denounced wrath—the most gentle of the children of men, our supreme exemplar Jesus Christ, looked round upon the hypocrites with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts (Mark iii. 5). He rebuked not *again*, when He was reviled; but of Himself He rebuked in the pure impulse of love for righteousness' sake; He used the whip of small cords in the temple, and zeal for His Father's house consumed Him. So be ye angry, ye parents, ye teachers and educators, ye rulers; let not your love be soft, but mighty in its trouble on account of sin, that ye may with all earnestness of zeal work for the accomplishment of what is right to the glory of God.

IX.

THE PERPETUAL LAYING ASIDE AND RECEIVING.

(Ch. i. 21.)

Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

As we have dwelt disproportionately long upon the single sayings of this Epistle, in order to apprehend in some degree their profound significance, so let us now, on the other hand, pause a while to take a general view of the whole. What is the design of St James in this most pregnant and comprehensive Epistle, which may be swiftly read, but must be all the more slowly understood, and which Christians of our own time, learned and unlearned, so much neglect? It is evidently not his purpose to lay down the first foundations of the Gospel, but to build upon a foundation already laid. Nor is it to build upon that foundation the superstructure of *knowledge* or *instruction*, which was St Paul's main vocation; but to *exhort* to a firm and secure maintenance of that foundation, which indeed

St Paul also never neglects. St James expressly presupposes the doctrine of St Paul:—if not as known among his first Jewish-Christian readers, yet at least as to be known among those future readers for whom, under the guidance of the Divine Spirit, his Epistle was appointed and written. For in the sacred Scriptures all things were foreseen and prepared for; and among the rest, that St James should follow St Paul in the order of the writings, and with so much earnestness demand the *works* of *faith*, as we shall hear in ch. ii. His doctrine concerning *the law*, which lies at the foundation of his counsels, is opposed to two aspects of error:—to an Old-Testament legality, on the one hand; and on the other, to a corrupt lawlessness, which might make its appeal to the abolition of the law. St James will have us remember that, even as believers, we are subject to law; but to the law as a law of *liberty*, of *love* (ch. i. 25, ii. 8). When St Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, addresses himself to proper *exhortation*, it is given to him even then to speak of *knowledge:* in order to strengthen the confidence and patience of faith. He opens first the deepest and highest doctrine concerning the person, office, and work of Christ; yea, his exhortation to faith becomes itself a doctrine, what faith is and whence it comes. St James, on the other hand, speaks of *wisdom*, of that altogether practical wisdom which approves itself in trial and generally in the *life* (ch. iii. 13). Each writer in the New Testament gives to us what was given to him of the Spirit; but all is strictly connected, so that the Church should embrace all in one, in order to obviate every one-sided apprehension of holy doctrine.

What kind of *readers* does St James here presuppose? He speaks, indeed, sometimes to such as scarcely do more than *think* that they serve God (ch. i. 26)—attacks severely the hypocrites, who *say* that they have faith, but it is a dead faith without works (ch. ii. 14, 17)—and even rebukes the adulterers, the friends of the world and enemies of God (ch. iv. 4). Nevertheless, he writes on the whole and especially to those whom he still calls *brethren*, and who have a living faith. *Your faith* —he said at the first in ch. i. 3; and ascribed to that faith the high dignity of counting manifold temptations to be pure joy! But he *exhorts* these believers, because their faith is as yet very far from being matured in acts unto the finished work of pa-

tience; he *warns* them rigorously, because so much of evil still adheres to them, which might lead to their fellowship with those blinded fanatics and adulterers. Thus he presupposes a foundation of grace already laid; but at the same time an important and dangerous *deficiency* in the full and perfect gift of God. He speaks as to regenerate—"God hath begotten us through the word of truth;" but as knowing that seductive lust is still present; yea, that, if the tongue were not tamed, the whole course of the old corrupt nature would be restored (ch. iii. 6). He rebukes them, because the one fountain sent forth at the same hole sweet water and bitter (ch. iii. 11)—summons them more resolutely to resist the devil, to draw nigh more earnestly to God, that their hands may be made pure and their hearts clean (ch. iv. 8, 9). Therefore, they must not stand still in idleness, which might lead to apostasy; but more and more fundamentally *hear and receive* what God provides and offers, more and more zealously *lay aside* the still indwelling evil of the natural man. In this *continual laying aside and receiving* consists the life and growth of the regenerate, as St James' saying here will teach us: let us notice both, and in the order in which he places them.

He first speaks of the *laying aside* of all evil: *why* and *in what way* is this demanded of us, dear brethren? Because the evil is, alas! still with us, as the words upon our tongues, and the desires in our hearts, testify; and as children of God it should not be with us! Because *every* unmortified lust bringeth forth *sin* again; every sin that had been put away grows again in more sins, even to the ruin of death! Because, on the contrary, the design of God is that as born of Him we should grow up in this new birth of the creature; until we, become perfect, are the first-fruits of the creation of God! The goal is the being entirely free from sin, the fruit of which is only death; the being altogether servants of God, that we may become holy, unto life everlasting (Rom. vi. 21, 22). Only thus are our souls saved: thus *wholly off! altogether on!* But how does this take place? When we, as St Paul also exhorts us, lay apart everything which may be called anger, wrath, wickedness, blasphemy, evil speaking, and lying; when we *put off* the old man with his deeds, and *put on* the new man which is renewed after the image of the Creator (Col. iii. 8–10). But this putting off and

putting on are not so easily and at once effected as the change of a man's garments; and it is this which St James here especially teaches us. The idle, foolish, and insincere, think themselves already so pure and righteous that they scarcely need any longer to hear, but may rather show their hot zeal in working God's righteousness upon others;—but their wrath and zeal is itself still human and evil, from unrighteousness to unrighteousness. This evil continually recurs, or is likely to recur: *therefore*, says St James, lay it aside! On that account seek not to work righteousness externally in wrath and contention, but turn your zeal vehemently and rightly towards your own hearts. Let your true zeal for God bend itself earnestly to this, that ye may become temples of God's Spirit, who would make you full of good works. But, this being your aim, you cannot be entirely free to the doing of good, as long as evil is present: the first and most necessary doing is the *putting away* of the old man, in order that you may not be vainly striving to cover the old man with what you think the new.

Therefore it is always first, *Wherefore lay aside!* Looking more closely at St James' word, *What* are we to lay aside? All *filthiness*, he says; that is, not merely that which we are wont to call filthy and unclean especially, but all *sin* in general as staining and defiling the soul. As in Heb. xii. 1, it is considered a *burden* which wearies and cramps the runner in the race of faith, and therefore to be *laid aside;* so here (and often in Scripture) it is at the same time an impurity which adheres, a defilement from which the inner man must be washed (St James uses in the original almost the same word by which St Peter connects with the sanctification of baptism the putting away of the *filth* of the flesh, 1 Pet. iii. 21),—all those unbecoming spots which the glass of the word of truth shows us to be still in our form (Jas. i. 23),—since the Lord will sanctify and cleanse His Church with the washing of water by the word, that it might be without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing (Eph. v. 26, 27). There are still the great pollutions of the world, which we long ago have escaped through the knowledge of Christ; and concerning which St Peter says, that he who is again entangled therein and overcome, is like the sow that returns to her wallowing in the mire, the latter end being worse with them than the beginning! (2 Pet. ii. 20–22). It is not of this par-

ticularly that St James here speaks, but of those manifold impurities and defects of Christians, down to the slightest, which stain and disfigure their character, adhering to that new nature which is altogether averse to them. O how inexcusably facile are we too often in these things; thinking in our hearts, "Every man has his peculiarities, failings, and infirmities, for we are not at once made perfect,"—as if we must *therefore* tolerate and consciously *retain* these defects! Brethren, thus should it not be! Examine carefully your daily household life, your intercourse with the world, and the ordinary strain of your thinking, speaking, and conduct; and see if there be not much in them concerning which you must confess, "This is not as it ought to be; this is not right in a child of God, and not becoming in a Christian!" But think not such things as these insignificant; for every such defilement, if it be not wiped away, eats as doth a cancer; to retain many little sins is already of itself a very great sin. Particularly that which goeth out of the mouth *defileth* the man (Matt. xv. 11). Are your words the pure truth of God, full of pure love to your neighbour, useful for his edification; salt, and yet full of peace? And if you learn carefully to mark the impropriety of your words, you will learn to detect it also in many of your actions. All this you must *put away*, as St James speaks as it were from without; but if you are thoroughly earnest in this work of putting away, you will further mark whence this filthiness comes, and where it is essentially to be suppressed. Not, as a child once answered my question, "What must a man do to reform himself?" according to the superficial teaching which he had received, "He must put away all his faults, and put on the opposite virtues!" It is not in this ready way that faults are laid aside and virtues assumed. Impurity does not cling to us so externally that we may wash it away as with a sponge. That which proceedeth out of the mouth, and similarly what the eyes and ears, the hands and feet, do,—all comes *from the heart*. Cleanse your hands, and purify *your hearts* (Jas. iv. 8). Thus alone we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness (2 Cor. ii. 1).

Therefore St James adds—Lay aside all filthiness *and all naughtiness*. Not that he means in this passage, as has been too hastily said, two things—the lesser spot, and the worse wickedness; but the defilement is at the same time *wickedness*

itself. If I would make clean my appearance externally, I must in so doing put away sin; else the word of the Master will apply to me as His disciple—Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within, in order that the outside may be also clean! (Matt. xxiii. 26). Else it might prove that I was a mere devotee, with Christ's garment drawn over the old Adam; while the old Adam everywhere peeping out must put me to confusion. St James, however, uses yet another word, which Luther would fain have omitted; but it is quite intelligible, and of great importance. The revised German Bible uses the apt expression, *Auswuchs;* that is, the yet *remaining*, and still forthcoming, aftergrowth of the evil root of sin. St James means by this profound and pregnant expression that which is still left of this root, and which may swiftly and unhappily come to light before we properly observe it. This evil residue springs up *not merely* as open *wickedness*, sin, unrighteousness, and lie (guile, hypocrisies, envies, evil speakings, etc., 1 Pet. ii. 1), but it mixes itself as a leaven with the good, and pushes it out of its proper measures. Therefore St James uses a word which at the same time indicates *superfluity*, an unholily thriving *too much;* for, this aftergrowth of the evil heart often exhibits itself as a superfluity of the seemingly good; while it is in itself not good, but a growth of iniquity. Wouldst thou be too wise with thy so-called Christian knowledge? Look to it, that there be not an undergrowth of carnal folly! Wouldst thou be very gracious and gentle with all the world, or very rigorous and severe against all unrighteousness, or very calm and self-contained in thy quiet internal enjoyment of grace—take care of the stain and the untruth which adheres to every exaggeration of every individual excellence. But this ill growth naturally hinders the pure growth of the good; as, for example (adhering to the present subject of discourse), the too much speaking is a hindrance to hearing. Mark now how the present text touches us all with its never-ceasing exhortation—*Therefore lay apart!* Take resolutely by the roots what of evil superfluously grows!

If we understand this and act accordingly, rather if we thoroughly and earnestly *will* to do so, then comes in the inseparable *receiving*. But what is it we are to receive? St James has before indicated the wickedness to be put away, in its variety and abundance—*All*, or *every kind of*, filthiness;

every such outgrowth, of whatever sort it may be. He does not, however, set over against this all kinds of excellence, but one thing. Nor does he here, with St Paul, speak at once of putting on the new man, the Lord Jesus Christ; but he goes still deeper with his word, and mentions that *through which* alone Christ can be put on, the true *receiving* of the gift of God—Receive *the word!* That is to say, the word of God, *the word of truth*, the best gift from above, the seed of our regeneration. Thus it is this word which must effect all; this word alone, and nothing else, must create all that is new and good within us. "The same word which created heaven and earth, accomplishes all; not we poor and helpless sinners"—said Luther, in his great conflict once; and so is it ever—The word does all without, and within also, through our own faculties. In whatever form God gives to our hearing a word of truth, it is a good gift of light and power from above; the good seed from which all good in us grows. That is the nourishment of the inner man, the true bread whereof he lives; that is the sincere milk by which the new-born babes grow unto salvation (1 Pet. ii. 2); that is the true washing of water unto sanctification and cleansing. It is for us to receive the word, until we ourselves become as it were a mere word of God in the new nature; until, according to the promise of the new covenant (Jer. xxxi. 33), all that in that word has been spoken and written is put into our hearts and written in our minds. Before, St James' exhortation was—Count nothing slight which is in you an impure thing, and a mere undergrowth or superfluity of evil! Now he says, similarly—Neglect, pretermit, leave not unaccepted any little seed-corn of truth from above unto sanctification; for it is *the* word in its entireness, the one word, of which ye are born, and in which ye grow and live. In order first to the *laying aside* (as he will presently go on to teach us), we need the word, which as a glass shows us what manner of men we are, and what there may be of stain or defect in us; but much more must we *receive* all good from the same word!

But *how* does this proceed; what is the *receiving* of the word? Merely suffering it to be spoken to us? Yes, if it be rightly understood what that means—spoken *to us!* if you understand St James' expression, *implanted* or *ingrafted*, in all its force. It will implant itself with all its energy, let it take

root and grow in thee; hear it for no other purpose than that, so that thy receiving shall be an internal receiving of healing medicine and food. The word of truth does not always speak gently and soothingly to us, not always in the consolations which God gives to His new-born children; there is severe instruction and exhortation, with which He disciplines and educates us into men of God. The word of discipline in righteousness has not a sweet taste; but it is wholesome medicine for removing sin. When you hearken to it, brethren—those in whom it is, according to St James, an implanted word—do you not hearken at the same time to yourselves, your better selves, your own new man? Does not the Spirit within you utter His Amen to every truth which from without or from above is brought to your remembrance and thought? O be reminded, instructed, allured, warned, urged, and invigorated by that internal word, *with meekness!* Contradict it not; but lay aside and root out all opposition of the flesh to the Spirit. Withstand it not, but submit in all simplicity of obedience. Avoid with all your might the wicked wrath of the old man, which often masks itself with cunning, and conceals the solemn truth that a useful and holy word is being repelled from the heart. If you observe it not yourselves, hear others who tell you of it. But how many are exasperated against the injustice of others, who have done no more than speak against their own unrighteousness; their anger bursts out, instead of meekly hearing, retaining, and pondering, the reproof in their hearts! But the true meekness of hearing and receiving is an internal willingness and resignation of such as are sincerely and humbly bent upon being amended; therefore, they are still and patient under the discipline of the wholesome word. They do not restively resist that discipline, as if an injury was inflicted upon them; for, to what end serves the meek reception of the word? "Which is able *to save your souls*"—the text finally adds in encouraging exhortation. Only the word *can* make our souls ready and fit for salvation; only the word of grace, through which, by the power of God, we are built up, until the full inheritance can be given to us with all the saints (Acts xx. 32). But only when we receive it with meekness, and are not offended by it, suffering it to build us up by sinking more and more deeply into our nature. Whoever casts behind him

a good word of God, or merely neglects it, rejects a grace, knows not an hour of visitation, and slights a blessing which would have been for his peace. But whosoever is in earnest to hear all that it imports him to hear, will receive in every remembrancer the voice which says—"I remind you of the Gospel which ye have heard, and in which ye stand, *by which also ye are saved*, if ye *hold it fast*" (1 Cor. xv. 1, 2).

X.

THE SELF-DECEPTION OF THE HEARERS; THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE DOERS.

(Ch. i. 22–25.)

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his doing.

In the constant *laying aside* of all filthiness, and *receiving* of the purifying word, consists, as we have seen, true Christianity. As long as there is any sin left, the putting away and renouncing must diligently proceed: else there results a wide and influential *self-deception*. As long as we are not yet perfect, without defect or stain, we must look forwards, with an ever more effectual ingrafting of the word of grace: else we stand idly in false glorying, and in *deceitful appearance*. But we must rightly understand it, that the laying aside and the receiving, *concurrently and together*, do not mean that we must first pluck up all the thorns, in order that the harvest of the new and good seed may spring up! The grace itself which we receive disciplines; the acceptance of the word of truth gives the impulse and power for the putting away of all that is evil and false. We *receive* the word, when we *not merely* hear it, as the word too frequently runs; though the beginning of all must necessarily be the hearing. Concerning this first hearing, in which a man submits to

be spoken to instead of being swift to speak himself, St James treated in ver. 19; and then in ver. 21 he added, in connection with the *receiving* of the word, obedience, in which man suffers the word to enter into himself. He now pauses at this important point—of so much moment to the beginning, continuance, and perfection of the new life—and shows fully how men, deceiving themselves, separate what is joined together by God, the receiving and the obeying, the *hearing* and the *doing*. Against this he solemnly warns all; and exhorts us to a right, perfect, fruitful, sanctifying, soul-saving hearing. He shows, further, how the implanted word *saves* the soul; speaks of the *looking into* the deep ground of the word, according to which it is to us a perfect law of liberty, as being the true understanding of it; and of the *continuing* therein, as the true *doing* of a free obedience.

He presupposes in all this that he is speaking not to despisers of the word, but to hearers of it. Otherwise the exhortation must have run—*Become, be, remain hearers* of the saving truth! When the Lord sends His word by His servants, the common people still hear it gladly (Mark xii. 37). But, even if *all* the people had heard, of what avail was that? Such hearing is not enough. Again, "*to be a hearer*," is in itself more than that merely willing attention to what is said; it is a good thing, though only because the zeal of hearing may and will lead to obedience. But all the *worse* is it, consequently, when so many remain mere hearers, without becoming doers: they deceive themselves! But those who rightly hear in order to do, save themselves, and are already blessed in their deed! *What then is the process in both these cases, in the self-deception of the mere hearers, and in the blessedness of those who are doers?* Let us hear St James in reply, with open ears and profiting hearts!

We deceive ourselves when *we neglect and leave undone the beginning of all doing, which the word constantly demands of every one.* And what is that beginning? It is not the premature inquiry—What good thing shall I do? that is in question here; but the first good thing at the outset is—to lay aside all wickedness! But how can we do this, without *knowing* our wickedness? This fundamental knowledge, urging to the abandonment of evil, comes never from ourselves; there is always a *mirror* held before us in the word of *truth*, which will prevent all self-decep-

tion. There I must contemplate and behold *what manner of man* I am, before the Searcher and the Judge of hearts: that is, not my *bodily* face (as Luther translates, as if the external figure were held fast), but, as St James says, my *natural* face, the face or aspect, the form of *my birth*, my inborn character. That is Adam's image, or the inherited corruption implanted in my sinful birth, as the form or countenance of my heart, of my inner man before God. St James speaks of hearing, because he has more direct reference to the preached word; but he is not wanting elsewhere in reference to *Scripture* (ch. ii. 8, 23, iv. 5), the sayings of which are to be heard, the law of which is to be obeyed, the promises of which are to be fulfilled; and much of that Epistle which he here adds to the Scripture is taken from the previous writings of Scripture. Now all that preaching can do is to bring home to us the word which is written; to take this clear mirror and hold it up to us. There behold I in the *law* of my God what I should be before Him in perfect love, and how altogether different I am by nature! There behold I in *the Gospel* the great goal set before me: how I must believe unto righteousness in the grace, communication, and fellowship of God who calleth me, how His Spirit dwelling in me testifies and works mightily against all hatred, urging me to love. There I see what I yet lack of the mind of Christ; or, better, what there is yet superfluous in me of my own mind and nature. He who does not know *that* through the word which he hears, *is* not properly speaking a hearer; he does not look into the glass set before him, but turns it (as, alas! many are very skilful in doing) ever to his neighbour and other men. As soon as God's word is actually heard, it gives to every man some measure of self-knowledge. True that thy name, O hearer, stands not in the Scripture; the picture of thy life is not drawn there; and the preaching, which brings home the Scripture, can be only a general preaching for all, and not expressly and particularly for thee. But still it holds good, that he who rightly hears *beholdeth himself*, and *that* not in a distorted image of a dark glass, but *face to face* (1 Cor. xiii. 12). Look sincerely into the clear mirror of the truth, and thine own face will look at thee! The word will tell thee all that thou hast done, will reveal to thee thy heart's ground, and judge all thy life. The looking of thy beholding eye is indeed the necessary

condition; but then God's word is also an incomparable glass for the full self-knowledge of every man. It approves itself thereby the marvellous word of the Spirit, the word of *God* which judgeth the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Now hast thou beheld thyself—to what end? Only to know what thy form and character is, and nothing more? O no; in order that thou mayest be *washed* from the defilement which the faithful mirror not in vain will exhibit! How then may this be overlooked and neglected? If any man is a *hearer* only of the word and not a doer; if he forgets and leaves undone that which is first to be done, and for the sake of which he has heard the word,—he is like a man who *beholds* his natural face in a glass, merely beholds without any further result; *for* he has beheld himself, and then goes away and *forgets* at once again what manner of man he was. This is a melancholy history, which is acted out every Sunday by multitudes of church-goers, and every day by many who receive calls and warnings. The poor man *has* really heard the good and true word; he has really seen in the glass that he is a sinner by nature; he has been constrained to behold the specific characteristics of his sin and defilement. If he were to carry all this away with him, how would its good results appear? He would feel urged to the first resolute doing, and say—"Thus am I in the sight of God; but thus I must not and will not remain; I must be changed;"—then would follow the resolution, "I will wash and be clean in the grace of the same God!" But what occurs instead of this? He goes away and forgets the same hour what manner of person he was! That is the melancholy history, *that* is the essential and miserable *forgetting!* There may be withal a careful retention of *what was preached;* but to retain this avails but little. Thou must retain that one thing in the preaching, and not forget what manner of person thou wast:—thou *wast* when the glass showed thee thy true form; as thy conscience admitted, being unable to contradict; and as consequently thou *art* after going away, and will remain if a great change does not come. Many hearers of sermons complain of the preacher, that they can retain so little of his sermon; but, when they make this excuse, they mostly rather condemn themselves as having *not for themselves* heard with the right attention. There is a kind of preaching which paints beautiful pictures instead of holding up the faithful mirror;

but if thou hast heard sound preaching, and beheld the true mirror, and looked so as that the word should seize thyself, and yet it remains not in thee—then the fault is only thine own, thou goest away and forgettest! We must leave the church, indeed; but not on that account must we leave the presence of God, and rush into the distractions of life, immediately after receiving the benediction, and being commended to the keeping of the light of His countenance. In order to fruitful hearing there must be first the opening of the heart, and *afterwards the keeping there* the word we hear. Many people talk foolishly of their sensations and profit while they hear; but there is no abiding effect of their feelings. To add another figure to that of the Apostle: the iron must be *fashioned* while it is *hot*, until it takes the right form! But to make it hot and leave it so, or at once to plunge it into water, tends only to harden it more and more in its present form. The poor foolish man whom St James means, heard the word and looked into the glass *as if passing by;* this brings him no amendment, but tends only to create the habit of self-deception; and the fleeting unimproved view of self only hardens the soul. This is in truth deception; and blameworthy, wilful *self-deception.* Such hearers deceive themselves first with a *wrong conclusion* (as the word here is in the original): they infer—I have heard, and am I not therefore pious? although the very word which they have heard uttered plainly—Thou art not pious, but must become so! And whence is this perversion in intelligent men? Mark what the text says on this most important point. Such a forgetful hearer is therefore so forgetful, and at the same time so unreasonable, *because he has not yet rightly and fully heard;* because he has not yet looked penetratingly enough into the glass. He who hears the preaching *merely* as the preaching of repentance for the rebuke of his sin, or in addition merely as a presentation of duty, as a demand of God upon his own doing and resources, cannot long endure it; he casts away the hard word at once, because it has become a burden too heavy, not only for his head, but especially for his *heart.* Therefore there are so many forgetful hearers, who reject the word because it does nothing more than trouble them. Therefore, of all the people who flocked to the preaching of a John the Baptist, none were brought in without the grace of Christ which followed; therefore nothing comes of the

preaching of the Gospel in our days to those who understand and receive the Gospel *not as a Gospel.* Hear still, but better hear! Look still into the glass, but *deeper into it!*

We are and become blessed in our deed, *if the end of all our doing, to which the word points us, is already apprehended by us as the real ground of our beginning.* What is that *end?* Nothing but the putting on of the new man! But how does that take place? No otherwise than by the receiving of the self-implanting *word.* It is *the same* word which shows thee thy sin, and offers thee purification from thy sin; the word of *truth* is also a word of *grace.* O that we all understood this, and would *receive* it unto its full and absolute working! The word does not only tell us what we are, or rather what we are not but should be; it tells us also how we may become what we should be, through the gift and grace of Him who speaketh with us. "If thou knewest the gift of God! Go call thy sins, and come back with them to Me! I am He whom thou hast waited for; Christ, the Saviour of the world!" (John iv.) Such preaching works faith, and creates a new thing; so that the overcome, comforted, and not merely terrified hearers, joyfully confess all that they have done, to do it no more, and call upon Christ in this new work of penitence. The Gospel brings to man the power for the putting away of sin, while it preaches and presents to us Christ. It gives to us *confidence* through Christ towards God; it brings to those who are utterly unable of themselves ability to turn from sin; it is no killing letter, but a lifegiving Spirit; it preaches righteousness in the glory of the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. iii. 4–6, 9). Thus through the Gospel the fulfilment of the law is established in us; for both are assuredly one in the deepest ground of the truth of God, which both saves and sanctifies. This St James calls here *the law of liberty,* by a contradiction which is blessedly harmonised. The Gospel is and must ever be a law; but it proceeds from free grace, and unto free obedience; without any constraint or fear, which never wrought a true and heartfelt fulfilment of any law. *Christ* has finished all *for us;* Christ finishes all *in us.* He who cannot as yet apprehend these two together in the deep ground of faith, vibrates hither and thither between law and grace, like many so-called Christians of the present day: now he comforts himself with the atonement; now he feels the keen impulse which

urges him to holiness, but not as the loving constraint of the Spirit of grace, for he receives even the evangelical exhortation in a legal spirit. No complete obedience issues from this; no perfect doing of the entire man in the freedom derived from a free grace. But he who fully hears the word *looks through* into the true principle of the glass; he receives and holds fast the whole truth, which makes free and sanctifies. Then there will be none of that false dealing with works which St Paul condemns, no anxious labour in one's own strength to work for one's own merit; but there will also be no *false dealing with faith*, such as both St Paul and St James combine to condemn. Then a man sees both at once in the glass: first on the surface his old man, which must be altogether put away to its last principle; but then he also sees deeper *his new man*, as it already lives before God in Christ, who is his righteousness. Then he is already washed and made clean through the word which is spoken to him, and which continues to say, Abide in Me and I in you! (John xv. 3, 4). For the Lord is the Spirit. But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Thus *is reflected* in us all—while the wondrous mirror of grace glorifies us, with unveiled face in all sincerity of self-knowledge and truth, and with faith equally sincere—the glory of the Lord; *thus we are changed into the same image* which we believingly behold, from glory to glory (2 Cor. iii. 17, 18). Thus the true evangelical preaching must be preached: that is taken for granted; but *how* do the true hearers apprehend this goal already for the beginning?

It is *apprehended* in faith, and in this all is said; it is *retained* in the heart; *that* which is now understood is *not forgotten!* He who has not beheld merely *his own* face, but looked through to the face of Christ; who has received the Sermon on the Mount from the mount of Beatitudes, at His lips who came to fulfil the law; who has thus accepted the perfect law of liberty; —is anew *invested* with righteousness, for he has learned to say, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean;" and further, "Lord, Thou wilt, and I also will from the ground of my heart!" Him has *the word* now first rightly and perfectly *seized;* he can apprehend and follow on to apprehend, *because he is apprehended* (Phil. iii. 12). Now, properly speaking, there is no other and new doing, but the continuing *therein*, in this

view, in this disposition and state of soul. "If ye continue in My word, ye are My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free!" (John viii. 31, 32). This remaining with Jesus, this continuing in *grace* received, is the whole matter, the whole of our doing. Hast thou seen thy sin? See also that He who showed it has already taken it away and will abolish it. See, *Christ is thine;* let Him henceforth no more go out of thine heart, never again go away from the sight of His face. Thus *Christ* is more *formed in us*, and the old form passes away; the buds become blossom, the blossom fruit, under the Sun of righteousness. The Christian no longer harasses himself with *individual* works in all kinds of legal endeavour; *love* accomplishes all. This is the one internal acting of the faith which worketh by love, as St James profoundly says; and such doers *are blessed.* But to understand this thoroughly requires a more careful consideration of the words which now follow.

XI.

THE LAW OF LIBERTY: LOOKING INTO AND CONTINUING IN IT: THE BLESSED IN THEIR DEED.

(Ch. i. 25.)

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

We have now reached a saying which may be called the centre and heart of St James' Epistle: he who understands this saying, he who apprehends and explains by its light all that precedes and follows, may be said to *look into* the profound depth of the entire Epistle. Alas! this precious Epistle has been in all ages too much misunderstood; and on that account too few have been found swift to hear it. Even Luther, that great man of God, betrayed the deficiency—if not of his spiritual knowledge and perception, yet of his doctrine of faith and works—when he contemned an assuredly genuine portion of

Holy Writ as "an epistle of straw." It might have been expected that our modern preachers of mere morality and good works would be all the more enthusiastic in their estimate of this Epistle; but, strange to say, that is far from being the case. For what reason, they themselves do not clearly know; but to us it is very observable, and worthy of observation. In fact, the Epistle of St James is very profound, very dogmatic, very mystical, but by no means merely a treatise of morality as such; it is pre-eminently a New-Testament writing, and by no means a legal one; its teaching furnishes us with a touchstone for the true understanding of the Old and New Testaments, of the Law and the Gospel, in their inmost and deepest unity.

It is more well-meaning than intelligent to say that St James here wisely enforces the law and good works upon the hypocritical upholders of faith, in order that they might be humbled and prepared anew for the consolation of redeeming grace. That he does not teach the law and good works in any such independent manner, but that he bases all doing and suffering upon regeneration alone, has, we trust, been made plain throughout the first chapter. The whole Epistle is consistent with this; even in the second chapter he only demands the living works of faith, as St Paul rejects the dead works of nature. But, as we have already seen, he is not exclusively dealing with the hypocritical upholders of a dead faith: they only receive incidentally their measure of condemnation. He rather presupposes throughout and everywhere the existence of faith: the Gospel, understanding thereby the first revelation to the soul of redeeming grace, *is not before him, but behind him*, in this Epistle. He proclaims the grace of atonement as *the grace of sanctification;* he leads us onward to that great step, which so many who believe understand not and are unwilling to take,—from justification to sanctification. He teaches that which is the *predominant* subject of all the Epistles excepting St Paul's, but which St Paul does not fail to teach in all even of his. St James does not here point to good works, even the good works of faith, merely as the counterpart of the exaggerated doctrine of faith: he comprehends both in their deep and perfect unity. His word is essential to the completeness of the New Testament; for it reconciles the two opposing systems of those who, on the one hand, have looked too much to justifica-

tion, and of those who, on the other, have looked too exclusively at sanctification, in their views of redeeming grace. Let us now consider attentively the important words of ver. 21, which demand our most careful exposition.

And, first, we ask—*What does St James understand here by the law of liberty?* At the outset we answer—Manifestly and assuredly *not* that which the Jews called the Law, and which was given by Moses at Sinai and in the wilderness; at least not the *Law* as it is opposed in the doctrine of the New Testament to the *Gospel*, as it is contrasted with the free and unconditional bestowment of *the promise*. This law, in its exclusiveness and rigour, was indeed perfect as commandment; but yet it was *imperfect*, or insufficient to save us and make us holy—as the same Spirit who inspired St James teaches us most clearly in the Epistle to the Hebrews. But St James speaks of a law which he calls *perfect;* and perfect to make men blessed through living knowledge and obedience. He speaks of a law still valid for believers in Christ; but could not possibly mean to contradict that which St Paul has testified concerning the abolition of the Law. St James can quote in the second chapter the word of Moses, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself!* moreover, the specific law, *Thou shalt not have respect to persons!* and shows that the transgressor of one law must be adjudged guilty of all; and he is thus one with St Paul, who testifies concerning the old and abolished Law that it is good for its legitimate use, to condemn the lawless and unrighteous (1 Tim. i. 8–10). This is its first and most obvious use, for which it was given before the Gospel: it condemns, curses, and kills, until the Seed of the promise comes; it is a schoolmaster to discipline for the grace of Christ, which justifieth through faith (Gal. iii. 19, 24). But it cannot give life, so that righteousness should truly and properly come by the law (ver. 23). St James takes care, indeed, not to lead us into the error of vainly seeking righteousness through the law; therefore he speaks of a law *of liberty*, and not of that law which binds us by its obligations, and under the yoke, pressure, and curse of which we are.

We ask again—Does he mean the *law of the Spirit* in Christ Jesus, to use St Paul's words, which giveth life, which makes us free from the law of sin and death, which fulfilleth in us a righteousness not to be formed in us by any mere com-

mandment or law of the letter? (Rom. viii. 2–4). Does he mean the law of Christ; that is, the dispensation of grace in the new covenant given to us in the Son (1 Cor. ix. 21)—which St Paul in another place (Gal. vi. 2), with as much simplicity as depth, utters in the one word of love—Bear ye one another's burdens? Or, the gracious economy of faith, which St Paul (Rom. iii. 27) opposes as the *law of faith* to the law of works? It is true that in that the hard and cold *Thou shalt!* which can never be responded to by the free and full will of the soul in sinful flesh, is taken away and replaced by the abundant offer of grace—*Thou canst!* There is to sinful man no curse unto condemnation, but a blessing unto salvation; no taskmasters' driving to an enforced and never-sufficing service, but a full *freedom* from all bonds and debts, freedom from the condemnation of the Law itself in the forgiveness of sins. There is no judgment, no condemnation, to them that are in Christ Jesus! (Rom. viii. 1); and they can say, We are justified by faith, and what can the law further demand from us? But when we ask whether St James here means this *Gospel as such* as it is opposed to the "law" spoken of before, and altogether sundered from it, we must reply that he does *not;* his meaning is somewhat different from St Paul's in the passages which have been cited. He does not mean simply the *word of faith* which is preached (Rom. x. 8), but the word which is of *doing* as well as of believing (Gal. iii. 12); for he speaks of a *deed*, and of *doers*, and in this connection he speaks of a *law*. A law of liberty, indeed; but yet a *law*, by which we shall be judged! (ch. ii. 12). How then are we to understand this? Assuredly only thus, that in fact *the Law remains in the Gospel*, in it is established and fulfilled; he terms "law of liberty" the law which has been made living and lifegiving by grace, the risen Law glorified, as it were, in the Gospel. We must constantly observe that the whole Epistle abounds with allusions to the Sermon on the Mount. So already the word concerning hearers and doers; afterwards, ch. ii. 13, the blessedness of the merciful; ch. iii. 12, the figs from thistles; ch. iv. 11, evil speaking and judging; ch. v. 3, the rust which consumes riches; finally, ch. v. 12, and most literally, concerning not swearing by heaven or earth, the yea yea, the nay nay. Now, what was the law which Christ our Master Himself preached on the Mount?

Was it the old condemning Law; or the word of grace, with its assurance of justification through faith? Neither of these alone; but both together in their perfect unity. Christ preaches the Law only as *fulfilled* in Himself, who had come; yet at the same time as *yet to be fulfilled* in the righteousness which He requires: He preaches the Gospel only to that end, that the Law may be fulfilled. Precisely in the same sense as the Lord of glory Himself speaks, James the servant of Jesus Christ here uses his peculiar expression. His law of liberty is the law of the Sermon on the Mount in its full and profound meaning; for, in speaking of *hearing* and *doing*, he manifestly has in view the Sermon on the Mount as the substance and epitome of the whole preached word (Matt. vii. 24–27). His words are not uttered in the Old-Testament spirit, and as introductory to the subsequent revelation of grace; but he points those who stand and glory in grace to the word of Christ—which teaches that the Law remains in the Gospel, and essentially belongs to it, though as a law of liberty. This is the other aspect of that which has been already enlarged upon: the hearer who rightly understands, who receives *the word* in order to do it, does not erroneously regard it as a merely imperative and exacting law, but as a word of grace; at the same time, in that word of grace he discerns a law for free obedience. For, so long as we are not perfect doers of the will of God; so long as the mirror of the truth shows us that we are wanting in any good deed, and that any evil deed is present with us;—so long even for us the "*Law*" remains to be spoken of. Despise not this solemn word; evade it not by the protest that thou hast to do only with grace and the Gospel; otherwise thou wilt go astray with thy supposed grace, and pervert thy so-called freedom into evil. But the perfect law of liberty will make thee free to all that is good, if thou beholdest it intently and continuest in it with all thine heart.

What, then, is the beholding and continuing therein, of which St James speaks? No other than the right *understanding*, and the right *holding*, of the word in its unity of Law and Gospel. It is essential that there should be, before all doing, a true knowledge and understanding; as our Lord says, If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them (John xiii. 17). For, how can I obey before I have rightly heard? *Forgetting* had been

spoken of before: What a man *holds not fast* he holds not at all. But now the word sinks deeper into the root of the matter: What a man does not *understand* can never be held fast. Therefore, let us beware of undervaluing a right understanding; let us attach to it, and to the sound doctrine and preaching which minister to it, their due importance! These St James presupposes, when he speaks of *the word;* but now the essential matter is, that the hearer attain to an entire and penetrating understanding. The forgetful hearer did not rightly hear, as we have seen, and that was the cause of his forgetting. He beheld *only* himself in the glass; that pleased him not, that brought him no help; it oppressed and troubled him; therefore he turned away from it. This represents the *superficial* among hearers. They behold not in reality the natural face of their birth, their natural inward form and character; and hence *go away* from the glass, to strive to mend their outward appearance by works of their own, in order that the glass may reflect something purer and more attractive. Or, if they have so diligently beheld as to perceive their essential natural sinfulness, they have not beheld profoundly enough: for, either they repel the burdensome condemnation of their sin; or, they despair in repentance without faith, which is the result most assuredly only of superficial hearing. But there is a similar superficial hearing of the *Gospel of grace*, an acceptance of the message of forgiveness which goes away and forgets what that grace requires and provides for a new obedience; and this is the result of a failure to understand its requirement and provision. Man would fain be only upon Calvary, where, with the blood, forgiveness flows. He persuades himself that this blood cleanses from all sin; but, in the accomplishing of that object, he thinks from Calvary to the Sermon on the Mount a *retrogression!* This is the indolent, false dealing with faith, which corresponds to the zealous false dealing with works. Yet no preacher of faith is responsible for this evil: he may testify with St Paul—*Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid!* (Rom. iii. 31).

To this superficial understanding, which is not merely one-sided, but views both sides *superficially*, St James opposes—But he that *looketh into*, or *deeply penetrates!* He beholds and sees both at once, as they are comprehended in the one word. He knows that God is *One;* and therefore that His legal and

His evangelical word, His requirement and His promise, are also one. "Is the law against the promise? God forbid! If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Gal. iii. 20, 21). But, similarly, we may add as the spirit of St James: "Is the promise against the law of God? (The *Father, forgive them!* against the *Be ye perfect!* so as to retract and abolish it?) If a *Gospel* had been given which did *not* give life in order to sanctification and the fulfilment of the law, verily righteousness would *not have been* through the Gospel!" To know this is to know the full truth, which giveth life and freedom. We *first* come to the knowledge of the "great distinction" between Law and Gospel, and *then* the unity of both; as in the depth of the law it is testified that God will redeem and save sinners through the revelation of their sins; while in the depth of the Gospel grace itself disciplines and purifies unto obedience. Thus the faith of God's elect is a knowledge of the truth which is unto godliness (Tit. i. 1).

This intent beholding is followed by *continuing therein!* When thou hast thus heard, understood, and accepted the word; when thou hast looked, as it were, below the surface of this wonderful mirror, the looking into which saves and transforms; when it has shown thee, not merely thine old man, but also the grace of Christ, and not merely His grace for thyself as thou art, but also thy new man as it is to be in Christ;—then art thou in the right posture for the entrance of the power of God, which will work all its mighty effects in thee, though not without *thine own doing* of that which God doeth in thee. This is the *freedom* which consists in the union of thy will with the Divine; this law of freedom is the royal, lifegiving *law* of love and grace, before the energy of which all stains of sin and all defects of strength must disappear. Continue *therein;* hold it firmly fast, declining neither to the right hand by such vain dependence upon grace as leaves the sin untouched, nor to the left hand by vain endeavours to save and mend thyself through good works. Such a man, one thus continuing, has undergone a change through the word; he becomes more and more perfectly *not a forgetful hearer*, but a hearer in the power and fruitful office of the word. The man who was actually a hearer, but has forgotten again, forgot through the evil of his heart,

through his lack of understanding and acceptance. But how if the heart has actually understood and embraced the word in its true meaning, and yet no fruit has been brought forth unto perfection? In that case it is no longer matter of forgetfulness, which presupposes error and weakness, but a slighting of Christ, a rejection of faith, an actual departure from the way first entered on. Against this stands the *abiding therein;* the *patience*, of which St James had begun to speak, vers. 3, 4, and which he now means by *continuing.* This is the patience and continuance which St Paul connects with good works in seeking for eternal life (Rom. ii. 7). He writes also to the Hebrews, just as St James does,—"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that after ye have *done the will of God* ye might receive the promise" (Heb. x. 35, 36). This is *believing,* or holding confidence fast, and yet at the same time *doing:* hence St James carefully says—Not a hearer of (or unto) forgetfulness; but an actual doer, literally, a *doer of the work.* Not, of *the works;* for, all *works*, of which ch. ii. afterwards speaks, are wrapped up in this one great and good work, the *work in faith*, or the *work of faith in power* (1 Thess. i. 3; 2 Thess. i. 11).

How then is *this* doer *blessed in his deed?* This is the last clause in the saying, and is now only to be fully understood. *Deed*—thus most rigorously must we accept it; for the *doing* of the will of God is, and has ever been, the goal of all. We are redeemed, we are purified, that we may be zealous of good works; that we, having believed in God, may be careful to be found in a state of good works (Tit. ii. 14, iii. 8). For, faith without works, dead faith, cannot bring salvation. Those only enter into the kingdom of heaven, who do the will of the Father in heaven (Matt. vii. 21). But this doing is not a concatenation of all kinds of good works according to the law of detailed commandments, not this and that and the other act of obedience simply; but a continual, consistent, living, and free *act* of the new man, the child of God. This proceeds from the whole man, from the principle of love in which faith works; and as such it is inconsistent with the patchwork of the legal nature. This springs from a constant acceptance and retention of grace, a continual living and abiding under its influence; and it is an obedience both of *freedom and delight;* and must not he

who thus obeys know himself to be blessed and happy? Yes, verily, as our Lord Himself said—*Blessed are ye*, if ye do them! (John xiii. 17). First, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see! Out of this blessedness of faith springs a new *life* in order to *do* the will of God; *then* it may proceed, This do, and thou shalt live therein! (Luke x. 23, 28). Mark that St James promises—He shall be blessed *in* his deed; not—*On account of it, for it,* or *through it.* Even David, without the full knowledge of Christ, knew enough of this internally free, *evangelical way of the law's fulfilment,* to be able to rejoice—In keeping Thy commandments there is great reward (Ps. xix. 11). But when the grace of Christ gives to us, through the Holy Spirit, a clear understanding of the law of liberty, and the power of a true continuance therein, we are made happy with all the ever-increasing benedictions of the Lord's Sermon on the Mount;—from the first benediction of poverty to the final peace in persecution.

XII.

GOD'S PURE AND UNDEFILED SERVICE.

(Ch. i. 26, 27.)

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Blessed are the doers of the rightly heard *word:* to whom it is not merely a law—as it is to those who burden themselves with works; to whom it is not merely a gospel—as it is to those who deceive themselves in their hearing and believing; but the perfect law of liberty! Blessed are those who penetrate this, and continue in it! True Christianity, genuine godliness, is matter of *freedom:* for God desires no other service and obedience than that which proceeds from a free and willing heart; and if His Spirit ruleth in us, we are *not under* the law (Gal. v. 18). But we are *in* the law, and the law *in us.* "Now ye are free from sin, and have become the servants of

righteousness, the servants of God; ye have your fruit unto holiness; but the end is everlasting life" (Rom. vi. 18, 22). St James presently terms the same a *serving*, a *service of God*. But this he does not mean in a Jewish sense, as St Paul before Agrippa spoke of the "twelve tribes instantly serving God day and night," with a vain labour against which all the prophets had testified to them through the Spirit of Christ, so that even Sirach could say: "He that requiteth a good turn (thanketh God) offereth fine flour; and he that giveth alms sacrificeth praise" (Ecclus. xxxv. 2). The blood of Christ now cleanseth our consciences from dead works, *to serve the living God* (Heb. ix. 14). We are the circumcision, who serve God in the spirit (Phil. iii. 3). He who is one of this number speaks with St Paul, who at the shipwreck said, "This night there appeared unto me an angel of God, *whose I am and whom I serve!*" (Acts xxvii. 23). First, we are God's; then and therefore *serve* we Him in the free gratitude of childlike love. Where this is not the case, a man may *think himself* religious; but he is deceived, and all his service of God is vain.

Thus St James, in the wisdom which embraces every aspect of a matter, adjoins a warning on the other side—"But understand rightly the blessed doing of the law of liberty! Be on your guard against darkness and vain imagination!" His word—If any man among you—requires us to *test ourselves within and without, whether we in very deed serve God with pure and undefiled service:* it points first us to our inward selves; and then to our external relation to the world.

But, in referring to *our inward selves*, he speaks of what is seemingly a slight evidence of self-government, the bridling of the tongue. Of gross and glaring works of the flesh he cannot obviously speak at first, since no man guilty of them can think that he is serving God. Nor does he address those who, though free from gross external sins, yet altogether live for themselves, and serve themselves instead of God, whose minds are fleshly, earthly, and selfish. Knowing this to be the case in your own conscience, whenever you enter into yourself, how can you think of reckoning yourself among the servants of God? Is there any man among you who cannot find any ground for thinking himself in any sense a servant of God—let him be converted from the error of his way, so that he may find grace in time!

But we have to do with the sincere service and obedience of God in the new life. It is to that St James applies his test; and it applies immediately to the central principle—Are ye conscientious and zealous in little things? *Faithfulness in little things*, dear brethren, is not merely something beautiful, and pre-eminent, which however is final, and consummates, as its crown, the general fidelity of the character;—but our Lord says as solemnly as truly—He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much; and he that is unfaithful in that which is least, is unfaithful also in much (Luke xvi. 10). *Only* he who approves his fidelity in little things possesses it in great things, and in his character generally; hence it is natural and right that a new and earnest obedience will begin at once with little things. He who in these little things sets out with a conscienceless carelessness, has generally no real and absolute earnestness in him. Hence so-called trivialities are the sure test of the inner mind and character. Conscientiousness down to the farthing is the standard of a truly honourable piety; little acts and single words show the full and pure spirit of obedience in the soul. One may appear, not only before the world, but before the brethren, as a religious man, and one may seem to himself to be so;—but the true *service of God* before *the Father*, who seeth in secret, who esteems little things great for the sake of the heart which prompts them,—the heart which He penetrates through all words and actions,—is a very different matter! Such a walk before God is animated by a tender fear of every the slightest defilement, by a strict fidelity to purity and righteousness down to the most trivial word of sudden discourse.

Therefore St James makes the *tongue* once more an individual example, and asks sharply whether we bridle it before God and for God's sake. It is only an example; but he wisely and significantly shows the most decisive and plainest mark of faithful and firm self-government generally: as he himself afterwards says—He that sinneth not in word is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body (ch. iii. 2). That means, first of all—He that lays earnest stress upon not sinning with his tongue, exhibits an absolute and pure earnestness to deal faithfully with himself. Alas, how many so-called *pious* there are—who at least are reputed to be so—whose free, unbridled tongues show, if not when heard abroad, when heard at home, that their piety is of

little worth! We have already heard a word against swiftness to speak; and we shall yet have a solemn utterance concerning the untamed tongue in ch. iii. Therefore upon this point we will say no more now; except that we would lay stress upon the words which are added—He that bridleth not his tongue, however otherwise pious he may seem to be, *deceiveth his own heart!* But this means more than merely that he deceiveth himself, and errs in wilful guilt, when he holds his vain, empty service for the true service of God. It implies that he who serves not God in truth, serves all the more on that account sin. In him who does earnestly and rigorously from the heart rule the tongue, the tongue rules the heart; it hurries him soon back again into sins, and thus misleadeth the heart, as we shall learn in the third chapter. But we can also learn it in ourselves, if we diligently observe and examine our own hearts: he also who governs not his eyes, he who does not rule his fancy, he who does not repress and mortify his lusts, he who lets anything in himself have its free and unfettered course according to nature—is offering a *service to God which is vain!*

Thus St James at the first pointed us to ourselves; he then adds another word, which summons us to test ourselves as to *our external relation to the world and our neighbour.* Here two things are of importance, as essential to the true and pure service of God: *the exercise of love*, which scorns and neglects no needy fellow-man; but, combined with that, a *prudent separation from the sin of the world.*

This is from first to last the sum of the commandment, *Love* out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned (1 Tim. i. 5). Hence St James speaks afterwards of fulfilling the royal law of loving our neighbour as ourselves! (ch. ii. 8). He who does that, is the royal ruler over himself with and in God, and truly free; only he who has exercised mercy will stand in the judgment before *that* Saviour and Judge, who Himself first exercises mercy towards the sinner, and then says—*Go* and do likewise! (Luke x. 37). Go *whither*, dear brethren? Every whither; for in all ways, which ye may frequent in life, the poor, and the miserable, and the helpless lie. The sin of the world everywhere provides that we shall have the poor and the unhappy around us; he who has a heart full of love will find opportunity enough of showing that it is in his

heart. Look around you; behold and think how vast a field for mercy! Are ye industrious and zealous enough in doing the work of the Lord, the saving, comforting work of His holy love? St James once more selects one *example* in this domain, that we may rightly understand our duty—the tribulation of *orphans* and *widows*. So he speaks in the proverbial language of the Old Testament: as Job mentions the widow and the fatherless as first among the wretched whom he had helped (ch. xxi. 16, 17); as Moses constantly makes them prominent in the Law; as the prophets perpetually exhort the people in their behalf; and as God calls Himself the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widow (Ps. lxviii. 6). And thus we are at the same time pointed to all kinds of misery which need consolation and help; to break bread to the hungry, to shelter the homeless, to clothe the naked (Is. lviii. 7). And all this holds good even still more impressively of spiritual destitution, in which souls hunger and thirst, needing the consolations of grace, the bread and clothing of righteousness. But St James does not mean, as the Pharisees of all times have perverted his words in lying hypocrisy, the external works of so-called human charity; but the loving and exercising mercy as religious acts *before God the Father*. It is therefore love out of a *pure* heart, *undefiled* by hypocrisy, vainglory, and the delusion of merit. He does not so much mean the works, which are the evidence of the spirit of charity, as the spirit of charity itself, the warm *impulse of the heart* which sends us to the miserable in their affliction. Therefore he does not speak of the food, clothing, and general supply of the wants of the orphans and widows; but of the *visiting* them in their affliction, the taking them into the heart, the coming to them with the best that we have for all kinds of tribulation, that is, with the true consolation. Yes, verily, those who are still without the consolation which God's grace imparts are widows and orphans indeed; they are the truly wretched in the way. They are everywhere to be found; yet, if we would succour them, we must *visit* them, *seek* them, that is, go out of our own house, not remaining self-satisfied in *our own* happiness, peace, and enjoyment.

But, secondly, St James significantly adds, that in all this walking and working in the world, *we must keep ourselves unspotted from the world!* In the beginning of the same verse,

the pure and *undefiled* service of God was the not staining our ownselves inwardly by unfaithfulness, neglect of self-denial, and sin: he now warns us also against being stained from without. For as everywhere in the world we find distress which should be helped, so also we find connected with it much sin; indeed, this sin is the essential distress, and it tempts us even while we are endeavouring to oppose and destroy it. O how narrow is the way of the pure service of God; how easily may something of the ungodly nature of the world adhere to us, our hands and hearts, while we have so much to do with it, and we dare not fly!

But what is the world? St James uses the same New-Testament phraseology as St John: Whosoever has not in him the love of the Father, whosoever doeth not in this love the will of God, but is ruled over by the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is of the world (1 John ii. 15–17). The world loves its own, the vain serve vanity, the creature instead of the Creator; that is, so long as it remains the world, it retains the hatred against God which rejected Christ and crucified Him, as He said—The world hateth Me (John vii. 7, xv. 18). And this world is always in the midst of Christendom; where is for ever the *offence* and the *woe* (Matt. xviii. 7).

Who is not of the world? First, and alone by nature among men, the One, the Second Man, who to repair the fall of the First came as the Lord from heaven (1 Cor. xv. 47); who testified—Ye are of this world, I am not of this world! (John viii. 23). Then through Him all who have received Him, and to whom He hath given power to become the children of God (John i. 12); who have embraced by faith the truth that He gave Himself for our sins, to deliver us out of this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father (Gal. i. 4). Can any man among us think that he is a child of God, without knowing how he became such through the regeneration which follows faith in the name of Jesus, without knowing that the Saviour in His mercy has saved and snatched him from the mass of evil? They who are no longer of the world can say—"*We know* that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. *We know* that the Son of God is come, not only into the world, but into our hearts, which also lay in wickedness, *and hath given us an understanding* for the know-

ledge of Him that is true, and for *life* in Him that is true" (1 John v. 19, 20). To such, forsooth, the whole word of God in the New Testament speaks as St James does: "Though the world hate you, ye must *love the world* in the love of God, according to the mercy of Christ which is in you!" That is as true as it is in another sense that we must *not* love the world, nor anything that is therein! Both consist together in the spirit of all who serve God in the spirit, and do the will of the Father. Through Christ the world is *crucified* unto us, and we unto the world (Gal. vi. 14),—yet on the same cross the world is at the same time *reconciled* to us, and we to the world. Thus we must not separate ourselves in a hateful spirit from those who in their wretchedness are the objects of our contempt—that is verily a *vain* religion!—but live soberly, righteously, and godly *in the world* (Tit. ii. 12); not being *of* the world, however, and not walking *with* the world. As God's children, unrebukeable *in the midst* of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom we appear as lights in the world (Phil. ii. 15)—out of which we would save and convert as many as our love can reach.

Thus we may hope now to understand what this means in the most comprehensive and deepest sense for the children of God, who, being still *in* the world, are not and would not be again *of* it, but—*unspotted from the world!* He who has presented himself in the reasonable, spiritual service to the Father of mercy for a living, holy, acceptable sacrifice, *conforms not himself to this world!* (Rom. xii. 1, 2). But woe to the fools who flatter themselves that this is to be speedily accomplished by a few external fashions! We eat and drink and dress like others; we use this world, we have to do with the creature; we do not as men among our fellow-men deny ourselves to humanity, and the common fellowship of life; but we take good care that we abuse nothing, that we suffer ourselves to be entangled and seduced by nothing and by no man. As He is, in whom the love of the Father was, so are we also in this world (1 John iv. 17). We hold intercourse, indeed, with sinners; we visit those who are both bodily and spiritually sick and miserable, offering to them consolation, and blessing, and help from God; but we give good heed that we do not receive from them any defilement of their ungodliness. But in this—as every one who understands what we speak about will agree—there is

danger enough to make us walk most heedfully: everywhere there are illusions which may lead us astray, temptations to vanity and sin, assaults of the unbelieving and perverse nature, requiring all our circumspection. A very slight complacency in one thing that is wrong may first ensnare us, and awaken a slumbering lust in the heart: presently it goes further, and the unbridled tongue enters into the danger, and this again leads to fellowship in act—until at last the Demas is fully formed who forsakes the communion of the faithful, and loves this present world again! (2 Tim. iv. 10). Or, if this last sad result does not follow, there is a grievous distraction of heart, a departure from the way, a defilement of the spirit. Therefore, the last test which St James gives for the purity of the service of God is this—in the works of love to *keep* oneself unspotted from the world! He speaks as if we in ourselves were altogether pure and without spot; but, thus warning us, he gives us to remember that we have within us still the inflammable matter of sin. Otherwise the sin without would no more touch or lay hold upon us than upon Him in whom there was no sin.

St James, however, would not say that we might utterly escape all defilement; for he knew well, even as the Master had taught him, that at least the feet must be soiled by our walking in this world, and that they must continually be washed (John xiii. 10). But, as he had said before, whoso seeth at once in the glass of the word these easily contracted spots, looks *deeply into* that same mirror and finds also the purification. He who diligently and sincerely strives to cleanse and sanctify himself, who puts away immediately every stain—*continueth* in the perfect law of liberty. And *that* is the great essential in all complete, pure, and determined earnestness of obedience, which esteems nothing to be unimportant.

XIII.

NO RESPECT OF PERSONS IN THE LOVE OF THE NEIGHBOUR.

(Ch. ii. 1–9.)

My brethren, count not that faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord of glory, suffers respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou here, or, Sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thought? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

St James has spoken of the charitable visitation of the poor, the widows, and the fatherless: he now connects his discourse with what preceded, in such a manner as still most keenly to test our love and mercy, that in which we should serve *God* in our *neighbour*. But he tests it with reference to our conduct in relation to the contrast and distinction existing in the world between rich and poor, exalted and humble. *The rich and the poor* must meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all (Prov. xxii. 2). Wherefore and to what end hath He made the one rich, the other poor? He knoweth full well in His wisdom: He knoweth moreover, what we also may and should know, that it is not Himself who hath made rich all that are rich, and poor all that are poor; but avarice hasteneth after riches, and sin plunges into poverty. The poor and the rich meet together; the Lord lighteneth both their eyes (Prov. xxix. 13). Forsooth, when *that* is the lot of both, they meet in very deed. But mark that Solomon in this sentence places the *poor* first: O that their eyes would receive the light of the Lord! If this day the possession of earthly goods was reduced to

equality, how long would that continue, how soon would the sin of men restore the disparity! But God's government suffers it to continue, in order that His grace may operate, and turn evil to good account, in ways which to our dim eyes are too deep and too high. Do not prematurely intrude into the Lord's province; *you* would rather make the evil worse! The only equality to enlightened eyes is found in the kingdom of God, through faith in Jesus Christ. The present age seeks by art and cunning devices to redeem itself from the misproportion which exists in this matter, and which indeed avaricious industry and ungodly lust of possession are continually increasing: this has indeed become one of the chief problems of dabblers in statecraft, reformers, and clamourers for right and freedom. But they will never accomplish their purpose, while they take not the method which God's word here prescribes. It is that of which St James here speaks. But not as of itself the main thing; for it only prepares the way for the reference to the royal law of love, ver. 8—to the perfect fulfilment of the perfect law in the genuine works of faith, vers. 10–14. But we will first consider these words in themselves.

My brethren, think not that the faith of Jesus Christ, our Lord of glory, may be held *with respect of persons!* That is the very general position which comes first, and ver. 9 afterwards returns to it. What respect of persons is, the world, which constantly exhibits it, knows very well without much explanation: we, dear brethren, it may be hoped, know in addition that it means the *external* respect which does not fall on the *right person*, that is, the man as he really is in himself, and according to his true value, but looks at the specious *outward appearance to the eyes*. That God does not look at the person in any such sense, is known to all who know anything of God; and yet how hard it is to come to a right appreciation and application of this, is seen in the difficulty with which the first Apostle was brought to confess—Now know I it of a truth! (Acts x. 34). On the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God it will be manifest beyond all thought and expectation of ours, that there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. ii. 11). The doing righteousness and the doing wickedness—this will be the sole and final distinction. This is plainly enough declared in the present life to all, whether poor or rich, whether servants or masters.

Whatsoever good any servant, as a servant of Christ devoted to the will of God, doeth, the same shall he receive. But the masters must do what is equal, and know that their Master also is in heaven, and that *there is no respect of persons with Him* (Eph. vi. 6–9). O how much does that comprehend! There are manifold varieties of servants and masters, of poor and rich, of lowly and exalted, of ignorant and wise, to whom less or to whom more is given. And this extends to the kingdom of God and the Church of Christ, even among the highest prerogatives and gifts of apostolical honour; so that St Paul could boldly say concerning the first-chosen Apostles, "But of those who had *respect*, whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person!" (Gal. ii. 6). We shall not pursue this too far, but prefer to observe how St James, the Lord's brother according to the flesh (in the eyes of men truly a great pre-eminence!), himself sets a good example; for he never makes mention of this honour throughout the Epistle, but places himself in common with the *brethren* under the supremacy of *our Lord of glory*.

This expression is carefully chosen for his phrase, which properly runs as a question, "*Do ye hold, forsooth, with respect of persons the faith in this our Lord of glory?*" Can these two things, rightly considered, consist together? He, the Lord of all lords, was poor and lowly in this world. Again, how does the glory which is His and which He gives to His people, the glorious riches of this mystery among the Gentiles, Christ in you the hope of glory (Col. i. 17), make pale all the honour of this lower world! How supremely and beyond all other concern important that every man should mind that one thing, the being presented perfect in Christ Jesus! (Col. i. 28). The fact that there is, even among Christians, so much respect of persons, shows how little the genuine and perfect faith in the Lord of glory fills their hearts. But the least and most external thing which belongs to a man's person, and which others may regard, is his present possession of worldly goods; and nevertheless, as evidence of their perverse folly, this is the first and the last thing that most men regard. Is it not now as the son of Sirach said, "The poor man is honoured for his skill, and the rich man is honoured for his riches?" (Ecclus. x. 30). That is, even if the poor man's skill is not despised on account of his poverty;

which, however, often happens, as Eccles. ix. 14, 15 more authoritatively tells us. There was in Christ's time among the Jews—who, besides the priesthood, recognised no other distinction of degree—so deeply-rooted a disposition to honour the rich and to regard Mammon, that He constantly made that the object of His severe denunciation. And is our Christendom wanting in this Jewish spirit? Rather, this age of ours, which would overturn all other government, seems likely to succumb under the vilest of all aristocracies, that of wealth, the meanest of all government, that of money! *We* are told, my brethren, as Christians—Let it not be so among you! Take heed lest you reject such trite and seemingly needless admonition. Practically, it is not so generally understood that, as before God riches and poverty are of no avail, so also among us they should make no difference. It was not fully understood even in the apostolical Church, for St James gives us a striking example.

If into your assembly, that of the Divine service, there enter a man with gold ring and magnificent apparel, a rich lord who bears his riches visibly about him; and with him a poor man in mean garments, showing the traces of toil and need; and ye should *look* at once upon the man in the costly apparel, and say to him with reverence—Take this seat in the best place! but to the poor man—Thou mayest stand there, or sit down here at my footstool! *do ye not make distinctions among yourselves, and become judges of evil thoughts?* Thus does St James paint from the life; and, although he gently puts it as only a possible case, we feel that he had seen what he describes. That the members of the church are not meant—who had their own places—but strangers who came in, is evident from the whole context. The assemblies of Christians were open to every man; and it often happened that unbelievers came in, as we read in 1 Cor. xiv. 23–25. That such a visitor might become conscious of Divine truth, might worship God, and avow that God did dwell among His people—this is what every man in the assembly should have thought of, and nothing else. But this eminent and gilded man must have a place of honour, as if there was something special in him even here before God, on whom such a man almost conferred an honour; he must be flatteringly regarded, as if much depended for the Church upon such personages being won. On the other hand,

the poor man is, this time at least, very curtly settled with *by the side* of the rich man. If ye do so, asks St James (strictly translating his words)—have ye not made *distinction* in or of yourselves (with evil meaning), and become judges in evil thoughts, on false principles? And how deep-rooted must these evil thoughts have been, when we read that in an apostolical church the rich allowed the poor to hunger at the love-feasts of the Sacrament, and shamed those who had nothing! (1 Cor. xi. 21, 22). What wonder, then, if we find in our own churches seats of honour for the great, and many other visible marks of distinction, reaching even to priority at the table of the Lord!

For there, most assuredly, we are all alike before the Lord. If the rich man has not that best robe which the Father gave to His recovered son, and that ring of the sons of God upon his hand—he has no value or worth before God. But a poor man, if he belongs to the great multitude of those who come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb—who, bearing that in mind, can dare to do him dishonour? St James laid the scene in the place of Divine worship for striking conviction; but he means to say that we ought not, in life generally, to have false respect, and form wrong judgments, and establish evil distinctions. For we are everywhere together, and by each other's side, *before God*. And He is the same God who has in this world made the rich and the poor, or suffered them to be so; who also commands His children by His Spirit to give even external honour, where that may be done without sin, to whom honour is due. Thus the false equalising of distinctions established by God is of evil; and springs, among the low, from the same pride which would gladly invade the highest places. Thus, also, the bitter contempt and jealousy of superiors, which often masks itself under the semblance of piety, still less consists with the faith of the Lord of glory, who Himself upon earth gave honour where it was due. But where it is not an external matter, based upon the customs of this world, where the kingdom of God and its order are concerned, where the question is the manifestation of faith and charity,—all evil distinctions should disappear for us who believe. St James, in ch. i. 9, 10, had already said how the lowly should glory and

the rich man humble himself: according to the same measure which we thus apply to ourselves, we should measure and estimate all others. Thus, for example, in the choice of officials in the Church, the exalted should not be preferred before the poor, who may possess much of the wisdom coming from above; in our confederations for the kingdom of God, we should not (as has been too frequently done, to the hindrance of success) seek to have associates whose only recommendation is their earthly dignity. And this principle should be extended to all our greetings of the poor, and to our equal reception into our houses of the lowly and of the great. "It is not meet to despise the poor man that hath understanding; neither is it convenient to magnify a sinful man" (Ecclus. x. 23). Assuredly, the distribution does not always hold good which assigns understanding to the poor, and godlessness to the rich; but how is it on the whole and as the rule? Our Epistle goes on to tell us.

"Hearken, my beloved brethren! Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, who are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which He hath promised (without respect of persons) to those who love Him?" *Hear*, in relation to this, how *election* is in this passage spoken of! The poor are not arbitrarily chosen that faith may be given to them; but those who are, who become, rich in faith, are therefore the elect, are heirs of the kingdom on the ground of their faith; for God has indeed *promised* His kingdom and inheritance to all who will believe, and love Him in return for His love. Will not then God, who loveth all men, save also the rich? Yes, verily, they may become everywhere His elect, even as they are His called; but they have become so only in few cases: God *hath* chosen, has been able to choose, the poor in preference to them. This is a fact so obvious to all enlightened eyes, that the question may be asked—Why doth God leave the rich in their riches, and not make them all poor? The preaching of Jesus was directed from the beginning especially to the poor; they were mostly the poor who believed the Apostles' preaching, as 1 Cor. i. 26–28 testifies. And is the case different now? If you would seek those who are rich in faith, and love God with a true confidence of hope towards the heavenly kingdom, you must go—as not among the wise, mighty, and illustrious—so not among the rich. Seek them in the cottages, and under mean garments.

And where, through the grace of God, the saying which makes the salvation of the rich so difficult seems to have its exceptions, mark well whether there be delusion in the matter. Thus much is certain, that the Christianity of a rich man is much more frequently spurious, and unable to meet the test, than that of a poor man. The test is primarily that of the charitable behaviour towards the poor. Hear, and take heed to the sorrowful condemnation of the servant of God—*But ye have done despite to the poor!* God hath honoured him, only ye have neglected and contradicted that! Is he rich in faith before Him—let not your faith, if you have it, despise his riches: the whole inheritance is his; you have a future king before you, who only waits for his crown. And if not yet, his very poverty may make his salvation probable, and his place among the poor brethren at the last. Therefore, scorn not the poor!

The *rich* on the other hand? Well for them if they as poor have become rich in faith! For they may do so. Abraham, the father of the faithful, was very rich, but all the greater was the virtue of his faith; and into his bosom many a Lazarus comes, before even one rich man finds his way there. Joseph of Arimathæa was a rich man; but also a truly honourable counsellor, who understood the counsel of God, waited for the kingdom of God, became a disciple of Jesus in company with the poor Galilæans, confessed to Him in His shame concerning Whom it is written for us—Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich (2 Cor. viii. 9). But are there many of them who thus believe, and know, and act, and confess? To the Christians of his time St James could write—Are they not (for the most part) the rich, who use violence towards you, and drag you before the judgment? Do they not blaspheme that worthy name by which ye are called? What they inflict upon *you* with violence and judgment is a subordinate matter; it is a sign and testimony how they are minded towards the *good name* of the Lord of glory, in which also His poor should be blessed as heirs of the kingdom. Thus, *if* ye would regard the right person—that is St James' meaning—ye must judge *accordingly*, and in every case anticipate the poor with love, and rather postpone the rich

man, in whom ye at first behold only his riches. "Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?" Among the manifold replies to that great question, we read—"*He in whose eyes a vile person is contemned* (despising those whom God rejects), but who honoureth them that fear the Lord" (Ps. xv. 1–4). And in the New Testament it is said, at least—"Let us do good to all men, but *especially* to them that are sharers of faith!" To every man, indeed; and neglect should never be unaccompanied by love. Certainly, St James does not mean that we should deny to the proud and unbelieving rich, the love of Christ which, like the doors of the assembly, is open also to them. All he insists upon is, that the poor standing by him should not be scorned with a sinful distinction! He requires only *equal love* without respect of persons: it is to that his whole discourse tends.

"If ye fulfil the *royal law* according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye shall do well!" This is the law which royally reigns over all other individual enactments; this is the law of the King in the kingdom, of the King of love, the law of Christ who bore the burdens of all; and it is to us as a new commandment, Bear ye one another's burdens! (Gal. vi. 2). This is the law and right for the imitation of His *kings*, of His chosen, royal, and free generation, His priestly, holy people, which show forth the virtues of Him who hath called them, in their own deeds (1 Pet. ii. 9). Thus, as our King looketh and judgeth in love, so also we, and not otherwise. Then our impartial love finds in every man a neighbour, a fellow-redeemed and fellow-called man; it prefers no one, it disparages no one, on the ground of anything in himself which should not affect the estimate. *Thus do we well.* O what a test of our love is this, penetrating our slightest deeds and words, and the very inmost recesses of our hearts! But if ye have *respect of persons*, ye *do what is sin*, and are convicted of the law as evil-doers. The law of Moses told the judges, who primarily had to do with what was simply right—"Ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man" (Deut. i. 17). But neither were the poor to be preferred—"Thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour" (Lev. xix. 15). And in the same

chapter the holy right of love follows—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord" (ver. 18). He who violates love commits *sin*, is condemned of the law as a *transgressor*—and not of this or that commandment, but of the entire, indivisible, royal law of love, of which St James goes on to speak.

XIV.

HOW THE LAW IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD AND KEPT.

(Ch. ii. 10–13.)

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

St James has given one *example*, selected one instance, in which the deportment of believers in their individual actions did not correspond with the general knowledge which their faith gave them. Does *respect of persons* avail before God, avail before Jesus Christ? We know well that it does not! But then he gives an illustration which is not fancied, but drawn from the life. He does not enter into the complications of the life of believers with the world, the all-pervading customs of which might almost form an excuse for Christians, if they should sometimes forget their Lord, and *not keep themselves unspotted from respect of persons*—though it cannot admit of real excuse, since all should be of *faith* in order not to be of *sin*. No, he speaks of the assembly engaged in the worship of God, where so much exhortation is heard against sin that it would be the heaviest punishment to many to be obliged to speak or do, before the assembly in the church, what they speak or do before and afterwards. If, then, of that place it may be said—Ye have despised the poor—how much more in their common life! And there are many other like things, concerning

which the law condemns us as transgressors,—let every man think of them for himself! How far is our faith from being all-penetrating, our love from being pure and perfect! But St James' design is not simply to humble us into this confession: he has in connection with that another design. He who transgresses one commandment which pertains to the rights of love, injures the entire royal law; the transgressor in the individual instance is on that very account not a keeper and fulfiller of the whole. He would lead us to the fulfilment of the law in freedom, from within outwardly: he therefore teaches us first rightly to understand the law as one whole, that we may keep it in its integrity, and with all the heart. *How, then, does St James teach us to understand and to keep the law?* We must understand it in the undivided *unity* of the whole; and then keep it in the living *freedom* of the loving heart.

The very name, "the law," gives testimony to the unity of the many commandments. *Many* laws, statutes, and ordinances, gave the Lord to His people by Moses; yet even then the Lawgiver cried—*Hear, O Israel!* The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love Him with all thine heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength! (Deut. vi. 4, 5). Thou shouldst not set before thyself the commandments and statutes as dead and rigid enactments for thyself, and in their mere letter; but thou shouldst direct thy heart, in everything that is said, to *Him who hath said it.* He is one; thy heart is one; love from thy heart to the Lord thy God is the one and true fulfilment of the whole law. O if they had understood this! But Israel *heard not;* they forgot, even when they would hear and obey most diligently, this essential *Hear, O Israel!* They counted the commandments; they distinguished between greater and less—obviously, that they might here and there find some which they could dispense themselves from keeping, without great sin. The Lord Christ led them back again to the words of their Moses, where He embraces the first and the second table in the two commandments of the one *love;* and testifies to them significantly—*On these hangs* the whole law! In that word He refers them to a symbolical token which they wore, without understanding it, upon their garments—to the *fringes* or tassels appointed in Num. xv. 38, 39, to be worn in

the lappets of their robes, with a blue riband to gather up and hold the many threads. The same blue riband which fastened the high priest's frontlet, "holiness to the Lord," was also upon the borders of the garments of the priestly-royal people called unto holiness. And it is love, upon which all the threads of the many commandments hang indivisibly and together. But the pharisaic spirit forgot the riband, and cared only for the threads. We Christians have been better taught, and have learned in our earliest Catechism the "end of all the commandments." If we all perfectly understood the unity of the law in love, it would not seem strange, but the evidently natural consequence, that St James should say—*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all!* But are there not many who must honestly confess that this is hard to be understood, and itself a stone of offence?

Indeed, this retains its rigid truth in all times for the perverted mind, which says or thinks—"This and that and the other I faithfully keep, according to God's commandment; this and that and the other I avoid, according to His prohibition: will not this avail for me, if here or there one thing should be found wanting? To keep the *whole* law, and fail in not one single thing—who can so precisely and constantly mark all the precepts?" Thus, they piece together their keeping of the commandments, their obedience, their *love* to God and their neighbour, out of individual acts; and are ready enough to forget this thing or that in which they are found transgressors, flattering themselves, as St James says, speaking only according to their perverted view, that they have kept (tolerably well, or almost) the whole law! If the one thing is objected to them in which they have failed, they cry—It is but one thing! This is glaringly the pharisaic spirit, which regarded only the isolated acts, and knew nothing of the indivisible whole. "He that *offends* in one point;"—St James does not mean one single failure occurring through infirmity or precipitation (although he afterwards in ch. iii. 2 uses the same word), but an abiding, predominant conduct in violation of one precept to which we cannot submit; a persistent repugnance of the will and life to this or that ordinance which lies as a stone of stumbling in our way, *and at which we always take offence*

whenever it occurs in our way. And in this sense his saying is incontrovertibly true. For, if my heart and will does not accord with any one command of God, it is absolute proof that my so-called keeping of all the rest is by no means genuine, and comes not from a heart supremely submissive to the Lawgiver. If a father, leaving home, left ten injunctions for the guidance of his child, and that child reserved one of them for transgression, would it avail him to say—Father, I have been obedient; I have kept nine of the commands imposed upon me? Every sin thus reserved and retained, every continuous transgression of one word, spoken by the same God, pervades with wrong our whole obedience, blasts our righteousness before the law, and makes all our beautiful reckonings vain. For He who hath said, Do not commit adultery! said also, Thou shalt not kill! If, therefore, thou commit not adultery, but dost kill, thou art a transgressor of *the law*, and not merely of this one violated precept; for thou art not submissive in thy heart *to Him* who said both one and the other. St James uses the rough letter of the law, the spirit of which testifies that all hatred is murder, and all impure desire adultery; we must not therefore (in the arch-pharisaic spirit) limit the words to the mere external act. He mentions the first two precepts of the second table, those against hatred and lust; and the two are one: for all hatred of our neighbour is an impure, adulterous lusting against holy love; and all false love of the flesh, which would entertain itself on the flesh of another, bears in itself most essentially the hatred of the true person. Murder and licentiousness are significantly related. And as in these two specimens, so in all the rest. He who thinks that on one side he is standing in the obedience of holy love, but falls out of it on the other, is not standing firmly at all. Mark well what sin it is in thyself which testifies against thee, and which among the commandments is the stone of stumbling that betrays thy want of perfect accordance with the law. If thou commit no adultery and do not kill, yet if thou stealest or liest, it is all the same. And the word goes on in its meaning—If thou dost not absolutely steal, but holdest fast an unrighteous possession, what a lie it is to say, I steal not! If thou lovest thy neighbour—that is, almost all people save here and there one enemy whom thou hatest—thou lovest not *thy neighbour* as thy neigh-

bour, but only because he is not thy enemy. If thou admittest the conviction of the Spirit in many things, but resistest Him in one—thou art not in any sense submissive to Him in thy heart.

That we all fail in many things, St James well knew. Are we then guilty of the whole—does the law condemn us all as transgressors? Yes and no, according as you understand it; rather according to your own relation to the law. St James would not lead us to such a conclusion as would warrant our saying, with a false doctrine which has, alas! with too much subtlety been mingled with the true—"With the law man can never accomplish anything; let us therefore give up all thought of its fulfilment: we are *free* from the law, and must hold fast the righteousness which is of *faith!*" Free indeed we are from the curse and the driving of the law; but are we free from its claims to be perfectly kept? God forbid! Would that be righteousness, which should suffer a man to remain in any unrighteousness? Against this very perversion St James here writes! He teaches us the great and decisive distinction:—whether the law still lies in our way, and hangs upon our souls; or whether its spirit lives in us, so that we strive to accomplish it with all our heart, to keep the whole as a whole, to relax nothing in it down to its slightest requirement. And this is no legal striving, but the true work of faith in power, in spirit, and in love; a doing which for ever finds something to do and to leave undone, but yet is fundamentally already one whole act of the heart and of the life.

Thus he teaches us *to keep the law in the living freedom of the loving heart;* for thus has it become to us *a law of liberty*, as he says again; and in this second place it is perfectly plain what he so terms. Certainly not the Gospel as opposed to the law, but the same law of commandments to be kept; to be kept, however, by the willing spirit as a law of love understood, and become living for faith and in faith. David prayed to God —*Unite my heart* therein and thereto, that I may *fear* Thy name! (Ps. lxxxvi. 11). He who thus prayed already stood in the fear of God, and thus attained to say—*I love Thee with my whole heart!* (Ps. xviii.). And God looked at his heart: David, although he had committed adultery and murder, remained through his penitence a man after God's own heart. He who quickly rises from his fall, has not wholly fallen. He who fulfils

one commandment from the ground of his soul, has kept the whole law; and his sins against other commandments no longer proceed *absolutely* from the depth of his heart. Thus only should we regard it, and judge; thus does the loving God of love judge, who is Himself the Judge as He is the Lawgiver; not the dead commandments in their individual character judge us. If, through the Spirit of regeneration, I am become one with love, which is the spirit, ground, and sum of the law, in my united and whole heart, then its commandments no longer condemn me—"Lo here or lo there, thou evil transgressor! Here thou revealest thy character!" But they graciously point me the way in which I must walk more entirely in the truth of God, which is the sole desire of my sincere heart (Ps. lxxxvi. 11). If Christ lives in my heart through faith, then all things proceed from faith for ever into love, in that love to be rooted and grounded (Eph. iii. 17). Then ceases altogether the anxious reckoning and distinguishing—This and that I have kept, that I have not yet kept! Then there is pure liberty of life and of love, the voluntary impulse of the heart in the inner man: the question then is not so much to repent of this or that omission, as to pray and work ourselves through love into the oneness with the law of liberty, to become strong in the inner man. This is, forsooth, what St James here teaches us; as strongly as St Paul himself he declares our freedom from all legal impulse to good works, and preaches that love which springs from faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the work of works; but he likewise most impressively urges upon us, "as free, not to use our liberty for a cloak of wickedness" (1 Pet. ii. 16). He will not drive us with a goad, but in evangelical grace he cries—*So speak ye, and so do!* This means for a certain class of people, indeed, as ver. 14 continues it, "*Do not only speak* of obedience and love, *practise* it also with all earnestness and diligence!" But for us all it further means, "Be as careful about the *speaking* as about the doing; no longer make an evil distinction between word and work, and greater and lesser sins in the one and the other! Be it your concern to transgress in no word of your mouth!" St Paul utters his evangelical denunciation of the slightest act of wrong with the right formula, *Behold, thou walkest not according to love!* (Rom. xiv. 15); and the same holds good of every word also which wrongs our neighbour, Behold, thou

speakest this not *according to love!* Be ashamed, and take heed; be more slow to speak! If we in this manner judge ourselves according to the law of liberty, and exercise ourselves from the heart to govern our walk—then *shall we* also *be judged* of God by the law of liberty. He will look at the heart, and the love which actuates it; so that the voice of the individual precepts which testifies against individual falls shall be silenced in the righteous judgment of grace.

Shall be judged—that certainly remains, and with that St James seals the evangelical exhortation. For, even the law of liberty is still a law; but where there is law, there is judgment according to it. The *deeper* the one seizes and penetrates, the deeper does the other. "I desired only thy voluntary love, and I find it not in thee"—will be the keenest condemnation at the last! Therefore will judgment without mercy proceed upon him who exercised no mercy; but mercy rejoiceth against judgment. The true and final judgment will determine its decisions by this, whether our hearts are found or not in the love of God; every other judgment will give way to that. Whether our love was or was not genuine, and consequently a doing and willingness to do of the inmost heart and the entire life, will decide and determine all. Everywhere in the world there is sin and distress; consequently, everywhere opportunity to exercise our love as *mercy* in forgiving and imparting, as God forgives and imparts to us. The judgment without mercy upon him who (with all his external legality) has not thus acted, will not only upon the mighty and those in high places be severe (Wisd. vi. 5–9), but upon every justified man who will merit the sharp word—Thou wicked servant, shouldst thou not have had compassion upon thy fellow, even as I had compassion upon thee? (Matt. xviii. 33). But mercy rejoiceth against judgment! This is a marvellous and profound saying of St James, to which it is fit that we should devote special consideration.

XV.

MERCY REJOICETH AGAINST JUDGMENT.

(Ch. ii. 13.)

For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy ; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

It has been observed, that "to discern the incomparable fulness and depth of Holy Scripture, we have only to test any other book as *it* is tested, by dividing it into sentences, sayings, and verses." How poor and insufficient then appear most sentences in the profoundest book;—but how inexhaustibly rich is the Divine Word in its minutest *sayings!* And the most observable thing in this is that—apart from the connection in which the discourse proceeds, a connection always existing though not always apparent—so many of the sayings of the Bible are so wonderfully deep and pregnant in themselves alone. Because the weakness of man is such that few can apprehend the process, connection, and meaning of a whole book or epistle; —because, further, even the most enlightened of us often need to be instructed, exhorted, and comforted by a short and striking word;—therefore the wisdom of God speaks in the sanctuary by proverbs, even as the wisdom of the people uses them in the streets. He who said of Himself, *A greater than Solomon is here!* spake mostly in brief sayings, each of which bears the impress of unapproachable simplicity, while every one of them is so wide, and deep, and far-reaching as to say almost all in one word that could be said on the matter. The same characteristic pervades, more or less, the whole Bible. Among the most suggestive and pregnant of these sayings is that utterance of St James on which we must linger a while—*Mercy rejoiceth against judgment!* In these three words (the original has no more) this man of God, filled with the Spirit, says very much more than a superficial exposition will find in the obvious connection. Thus, he does not only say—He who hath shown mercy will one day be able to stand with joy before the claims of judgment! But, in order to lay the first and deepest foundation for this, St

James speaks thus simply concerning mercy and judgment in general, concerning the triumph and glorying of mercy against and over judgment. Let us not rob this most impressive saying of its rights, but consider: How this was a great truth from eternity *in God*, and in God for us; how it must become a truth and reality *in ourselves;* and how, finally, in the day of judgment it will hold good *between God and us*. Thus understanding it, we shall be able to perceive that the wisdom of St James in this single saying exhibits to us the *whole mystery of the atonement, together with the mystery of regeneration*, as the key to the true *judgment* of God in the end of the world.

He speaks simply and unconditionally of *judgment*. He means, undoubtedly, a judgment which does not maintain its right to the glory of a final victory, but is overcome; yet he speaks not of a false judgment, but of that true judgment which should ever maintain its rights, and be victorious:—hence is the glorying over *it* so great and marvellous a thing! When we hear of judgment, we think of being right or being wrong before Him who judgeth. And what man is there who can sustain his righteousness before God, the Judge of all the world? What son of Adam has not fallen under the condemning sentence of supreme and holy justice? We are altogether sinners: there is no distinction, no glorying of any one mortal; we must all stop our mouths, instead of rejoicing against justice. The voice of conscience in every sincere soul bears witness for God that death is deserved; he who approaches the throne of the King of kings must, like Mephibosheth before David, think only of mercy, and confess—What right have I yet, or to cry any more unto the king? (2 Sam. xix. 28). And although there is, otherwise viewed, a relation of worse and worst among sinners; yet this distinction vanishes again, in as far as the least sinner is guilty enough for full and final condemnation. The whole world has fallen under the righteous judgment of God. It *must* consequently be condemned—*if* the living God Himself were *only* a rigid and inflexible Righteousness, a dead *law* (or "moral absolute Ruler of the universe," as the fashion is to speak), the firm, inviolable *right* of which knew nothing of mercy. But He is the *Lawgiver;* and the question is not so much that it is said, Thou shalt not do this or that! as of *Him who hath said it!* This supreme *Lawgiver* can, like every one

of His feeble representatives upon earth, condemn in His supremest right; but He can also acquit, forgive, and save (Jas. iv. 12). He gave the commandment of His holy love, as it was founded from eternity in His nature and will, to us sinners who have broken it, and can never again of our own power keep it. He knows well that it condemns us: not, however, to condemn us has He given it, implanted it in our minds, and written it down; but rather that it may convince us of our guilt, in order to our being absolved. This is a first judgment of God upon us; but it is not abiding, and not the last. The sinful man must once come into the righteous judgment before the face of the Holy One; every sin must, with its guilt, be placed once in the light of eternal justice: this is not relaxed in the case of any sinner soever, and this is the contention and anger of God with us. But that God will not contend always, nor keep His wrath for evermore. Far be it from us to say, that this He *must* do under the compulsion of His mere justice! He is a living and free God; a God who communicates all His good, even the most communicable good in His most essential being: —for He is and must ever be *love*, from the time that in love He first created a world out of Himself, to the time when He decreed to save a world that was lost. May we form to ourselves the notion of a dead (abstract) essence, instead of this living God, and say—God *is* infinity, or eternity? Assuredly not! we may not even say—for the Scripture never says—God is omnipotence. "Behold, God is mighty, yet despiseth not any: for *He is mighty in strength of heart*"—as Elihu as humanly as profoundly tells us (Job xxxvi. 5). Or, is it anywhere written, God is righteousness, or justice? But *God is love!* Even in God Himself, to speak as men, love is the greatest of all the perfections, the bond of perfection, apart from which the attributes of the perfect God would not be perfect for themselves alone. Therefore speaketh the Son of the Father—God so loved, yea, from eternity loved, the sinful world, in its guilt and doom! He sent His Son into the world, and gave Him up for the world, not that He might condemn the world, but that no man should perish! The love, which cannot and will not be lost, is *mercy:* thus in *God Himself* mercy rejoiceth against judgment; thus in His nature and will saving love victoriously triumphs over condemning judgment.

But it must be understood that this *Divine* mercy is not unrighteous; it is not an arbitrary abolition of eternal justice. Righteousness and judgment are the firm immoveable foundation of His throne; to maintain this right, to retrieve it where it has been even relaxed by Himself, grace and truth, and goodness and faithfulness, go before His face, as it were, as the ministers of His wonderful government (Ps. lxxxix. 15). On that very account God cannot in His mercy remit anything of His right; He cannot therefore regard the sin and leave it remaining, because no sinner can be saved in his sin. Therefore, further, He cannot take away the sin by arbitrary power, because the sinner is a creature free. Thus, in order to salvation, there is a merciful and gracious judgment. Against this, indeed, the devil protests, who in his own guilt and character can experience and endure only justice, who is therefore the representative and advocate of wrath, the accuser with the deadly words—Let right be done, and perish the world! (*Fiat justitia et pereat mundus.*) That righteousness cannot be retained and honoured, if it be accomplished in mercy! "For the Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works" (Ps. cxlv. 17). "Zion must be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness" (Is. i. 27). We shall not develop this any further; but simply indicate how the sentence of St James, concerning *the mercy which itself according to justice retains wondrously its rights over judgment* (for else there would be no real *glorying!*), penetrates deep into the *mystery of the atonement.* We know, as Christians, how all the tender mercy and loving-kindness which have been ever of old laid up for sinful men (Ps. xxv. 6), has revealed itself in its sacred foundation of justice through the cross of Christ. The whole world was ripe for judgment; but instead of the judgment came the Redeemer, and entered for the world's sake into a judgment the issue of which was the victory of mercy; and this was the glory of the *Righteous Father.* Now God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus (Rom. iii. 26). Thus *for* every one of us mercy rejoiceth against judgment, when we are justified and acquitted.

But, after the first forgiveness, mercy is implanted *in us also*, and thus in deed and truth exhibits this rejoicing. It is not merely needful that we receive *forgiving* grace; we must have

faith in Him who maketh the ungodly just (Rom. iv. 5)—so that the justifying word may be also a justifying deed, an actual *making just*. How could we be happy or saved, if sin should remain? How could the righteous Father leave sin in His children? Where would then be the righteousness in mercy; and whence would come the peace of reconciliation in the conscience? He who can still say—I will sin, I will continue in sin! cannot *rejoice* even in repentance, much less in having faith in a grace which has been received: he has not yet penetrated through judgment to love. In this consists and is demonstrated the wonder of our redemption, that with the guilt the sin itself is taken away. But sin is *the unrighteousness*, the opposition to the law (1 John iii. 4), the contradiction to the Divine law of *love*. It is selfishness, which despises the neighbour, and in him the common Creator and God of mercy; it is godless pride, which sets the I upon the throne; murderous hatred, which will not abide the rights of others beside self; the wretched wrath without love, which worketh not the righteousness of God. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him (1 John iv. 16). We have not all abode in love; therefore from the heart and bosom of God, love, as showing mercy, comes anew to us, that it may enter *into us*, and re-establish itself in us through the abounding triumph of mercy against judgment. He who apprehends and experiences this, loves Him who first loved himself, and in Him loves his brethren also. This is the renewed law in Christ; no longer as a dead, condemning *Thou shalt!* but as a new life, as spirit and power from God. See therefore how profoundly and simply St James utters the *mystery of regeneration* in the word which has now become the *rule of our life*, the impulse and thought of our heart—Mercy rejoiceth against judgment! He who, through love by himself received, can love again, is born of God. God judges not, and has not condemned us; so we also condemn not, and thus secure the continuance of our own not being condemned. Only if we forgive as we have been forgiven, does our forgiveness abide a reality. He has shown mercy to us, that we may show mercy even as He has; and only thus does mercy maintain its triumph against judgment: thus is the law fulfilled in us with all its requirements, while it must withdraw its curse. "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having com-

passion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous! (1 Pet. iii. 8); and that not merely the saints, and brethren among themselves; but there must be a universal love for the whole world! How could I ever have entered among those brethren, if the love of God had not fallen upon me while I was still in the world? As in St James' time the assembly of Christians was open to Jews and Gentiles alike, so is the mercy of God free for all sinners. Therefore make no wicked distinction, beloved brethren! Even the rich, who still exercise violence upon us, and draw us before the judgment-seats, we are not, on our part, to judge with a judgment of evil thoughts against the thoughts of God! The blinded Jews imagined that their Messiah must necessarily condemn the world without: false Christians, who would similarly arrogate all the grace of Christ to themselves, act very much in the same manner in their condemnation of unbelievers. The true children of God through Christ act not thus! They know indeed that there is a world, the ungodliness of which they renounce, and from which it is their diligent endeavour to keep themselves unspotted—but they love the world which hates them, even as God loves it. Their motto, in all cases when others would condemn and withhold all expression of compassion, is still — Mercy rejoiceth against judgment! Saving, communicating, forgiving love goes before and gets the victory! That abolishes every distinction of every kind, and all respect of persons: it knows not stranger or brother, enemy or friend; it never stands upon absolute justice, but takes precedence in its might of love. We should desire to be no more than *vessels* of God's mercy, which do not reserve in themselves that mercy as their own spoil, but impart it everywhere for its greater *glory* in its fruits. Thus only do we love in word and act, in deed and truth. Upon him who hath not *practised* mercy, judgment without mercy will in righteous retribution return; that which he had escaped will fall back upon him again, because he did not retain mercy in *his* heart. We indeed too often *overlook* the time and opportunity of exercising charity, through the fault of our heart, which is not vigilant enough in love; we even *leave undone* many good things which we know to be our duty, and that is still greater sin; sometimes, finally, it may be that we do our neighbour evil through the remains of the evil heart. But when these sins

against love are the bitter grief of our regenerate souls, and we place the whole trust of our guilty souls in His mercy, stedfastly striving to become merciful even as He is merciful,—then does His voice cry against His condemnation in our forgiven consciences, *Mercy rejoiceth against judgment!* and by that same *law of liberty*, which in its deepest principle knows only of love, shall we be finally judged in the last great day of judgment.

There remaineth such a *judgment* even for the pardoned,—a great and final decisive day of judgment! But mercy itself will judge. Jesus Christ, the sympathising High Priest, the Son of Man, sitteth upon the throne. Verily He will be to His redeemed a merciful Judge; and, because the righteous Father, the Lawgiver, hath given all judgment into His hands, He will bestow salvation on all on whom He *can* bestow salvation. Should the justice of God, after having sunk in mercy, rise again in all its stern severity of justice; should it return back in its dealing with us to the standard of law—then verily would the Lord find, even in His saints, enough to blame, and not one of them would stand before Him! *Therefore* St James carefully abstains from saying, *The merciful man* rejoiceth against—as if such a thing might ever have been said of a sinful creature! God alone Himself is and abides *the Merciful*, even in *judgment*. But on that account He will acquit and not condemn all, whom He admits to mercy, and has exercised in His grace, and purified and confirmed by trials; He will with the same compassion take away the last guilt, repair the last fault, and of His final and perfect grace *bestow* the crown—on those who *love Him!* and who therefore loved their brethren also! Where love finds its own image re-established, where the mercy of God in the deep ground of man's heart meets mercy, there the Divine compassion abolishes, as its final triumph, every the last failure and spot of the human spirit; so that judgment remains finally overcome. Only he who in his whole life never showed true mercy, because the ground of his heart could not be seized by the love of God, is the man whom God *cannot* save. Love demands the fruit of love—the same love which sowed pure love in time—and that is the mystery of the last day. This judgment, on the right hand superabundantly merciful, on the left all the more fearfully unmerciful, will proceed without *respect* of persons, or will look upon the *right* person in the fullest sense of that word: no

sins will be regarded then which were not retained by the true person of the inner man; there will avail no *faith* of the mere lips, of mere knowledge, or of imagination, no church, no dogmatics; then the Samaritan will confront the priest and the Levite, and the mercy which he exercised will give evidence for him; then, as Matt. xxv. assures us, many who may never have known the person or name of Jesus will have their deeds of mercy called to remembrance. Thus both in the beginning and at the end His words are, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall"—note well, ye who would pervert the sacred saying, in favour of your fancied proud "benevolence"—"they shall," not be deservedly rewarded according to strict right, but assuredly for their mercy's sake, "*obtain mercy.*"

XVI.

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS.

(Ch. ii. 14–19.)

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which be needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. But a man may say, Thou hast faith and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith with my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble.

How much controversy and contention there is in the world—in the *world* indeed—through *manifold opinions* and *manifold sayings* concerning all kinds of things! Not even about their own things can the world agree, and how should they understand Divine truth? But even in Christendom and among Christians, how many contentions there are about this same Divine truth! Not merely among churches and confessions; in every evangelical congregation, often among the smallest societies of brethren, many are the forms and fashions of speaking and of acting, of doctrine and of life: opinions, systems, watchwords for the truth, which is but one, of the most different

sound! This is an evil which extends very far among those that are sincere; whose hearts would not err, and perhaps do not really err, but only speak of the same thing in words not the same. He who should stumble at *this* variety of tongues, as if on account of it there could be nothing true and certain, would grievously err. He who has true wisdom finds the truth very often on both sides of an apparent contradiction. Even the truth of God, the doctrine of salvation, has often in its essential matter two opposite aspects: and, that being so, can the word concerning it be otherwise than two-sided? The word properly takes its form according to the present position and understanding of him that speaks; and also according to the need of the hearer. Thus the more truly and rightly believers on both sides intend it, each in his place, the more different obviously will be their words.

There is scarcely any word in human language for spiritual and Divine things, which can be used without any possibility of misunderstanding; therefore, it is no other than an error which wilfully clings to words when the exhortation to *speak the same thing* (1 Cor. i. 10) is itself misunderstood and perverted. Not so the Holy Ghost in Scripture, who changes the voice and expression as often as it might be expedient to do so; in order that, if one sentence be wilfully pressed, another may plead—But this is not the meaning! in order that, amid many contradictions and contrasts, we may find the deepest unity, and be taught many-sided truth by everywhere giving heed to the "Again it is written!"

Thus is it with one of the most remarkable contradictions in Holy Scripture—which, however, is no real contradiction—the twofold doctrine concerning faith and works, as given by St Paul and St James. To set it clearly before our eyes, we must read on at once to ver. 24 of this chapter. "*Ye see, then*, how that man is justified *by works*, and *not* by faith *only*." So says St James, although St Paul had said, "*Therefore, we conclude* that a man is justified *without* the works of the law, *only by faith*" (Rom. iii. 28). And yet both are perfectly right; they are one in the deepest principle; they both speak the truth by the Holy Ghost, and together the whole truth. We must here observe, at the outset, that the Holy Spirit has avoided all extreme contradiction in the words; for it is well

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known that Luther ventured to insert in the passage of the Romans the critical and easily-misunderstood little word of contention, "*alone:*" St Paul left that unsaid, so that St James after him[1] might be at full liberty to use it. Would that Luther, however right his intention might have been, had refrained from thus arbitrarily *pointing* the word of God! And, still more, would that those who have contended since his time for the pure doctrine, had submitted to the word as it is found in St James, and learned from it the great danger which besets a one-sided statement of the truth! An unhappy misunderstanding and perversion of the Lutheran doctrine of faith has misled and corrupted the Church; and it is still reproduced to its great injury. It is against this that St James now bears his testimony; a testimony so simple, and so keen, and so clear, that whosoever receives his word, as being also the word of God, must be defended or redeemed from such an error.

What *helps* it, my brethren, if a man *saith he hath* faith, and *yet hath not works?* Can *that* faith save him? Already, in this first verse, all is made clear to simple eyes. Assuredly, the Lord Christ everywhere required only faith; He uttered His promises, healing, and grace only to faith; all His Apostles, and St Paul especially, teach precisely the same thing. But we also know that Christ came not to abolish, but to fulfil the law; that at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, and at the close of His teaching before the people, He required the doing, the fruit, the works for the judgment; and that St Paul does not abolish the law by the doctrine of faith, but establishes it (Rom. iii. 31), and speaks of every man being rewarded in the judgment according to his *works!* Thus, the question here is of a faith which produces works; and not of faith *alone* in the evil sense, as being a mere, a naked faith, workless and unfruitful. Such a "faith" is, indeed, strictly speaking, no faith at all, only a lying *talking* about it, which St James then afterwards, in order to speak with such people in their own language, terms a so-called *believing*. When St Paul bids Titus rebuke the false Christians in Crete, who dared to be in the church while, like the rest of the Cretans, they

[1] Whether he wrote after St Paul in the order of time, does not affect the question; now, *in the plan of Holy Scripture*, his Epistle is to be read after St Paul.

remained liars and slow bellies, in order that they might become *sound* in the faith, he says concerning them—They *say* that they know God, but they deny it in their *works;* seeing that they are an abomination, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate! (Tit. i. 12–16). In that he is literally at one with St James: Every one *saith* he hath faith, and yet hath not works! Thus does he maintain that he hath the power, but without the effects of that power?—the light, but without its shining?—the tree, without its fruits?—faith in love, without that love in the heart, and becoming effectual through love? Luther has not translated here quite literally, but the sense is good—"and have not *the* works"—that is, the works which necessarily belong to faith and spring from it; since faith without works, to have faith and yet not to have works, is an unreality and nothing. Certainly it is not meant that faith and works must coexist and be present *together* as distinct, according to the notion of many; as if man exercises faith in grace for the supply of what is lacking, but must *also*, in addition and concurrently, care for good works, which again might come from some other source! For then neither would express the truth—neither faith nor works.

St James began in ch. i. 3 with *faith*, requiring then that men be *doers* of the word, and not merely hearers. Again, in ch. ii. 1, he begins to ground all upon *believing* in our Lord of glory; and then exhorts to the *practice* of mercy according to the law of liberty. He now meets the foolish objection, which might evade the exhortation and say—Is it necessary and right thus to urge us to doing and works, who already have faith, and on account of our faith through grace are saved? What *helps it*, answers St James, if your "faith" shows itself by the failure of works to be an idle *talking* about faith? *Can* then *such* a faith, as ye call it, really save you? For, what helps it, and of what use is it, what anywhere can avail—*word without truth in work?* He then at once exhibits a striking example, and takes it from the *love of our neighbour*, in which the folly and vanity of a mere saying without doing is most directly apparent. If a brother or sister, to whom we are bound to show love, lacks clothing or daily bread, what kind of talking about love would that be which did not feed and clothe the naked and the hungry? What would that *help?* Obviously,

he supposes the case that we ourselves are not in want like the brother or sister, but that we *could* give what bodily necessity demanded. What a lying counterfeit of love if we should only *say*—Be thou helped, we wish it from our heart! Luther has again translated unliterally—but in token that he here understood the matter, and would more sharply express the truth—"*Gott* berathe euch!" *God provide for thee!* That would be the vilest prostitution of the name of God, under the guise of piety; the hypocrite would refer the poor to the comfort of the blessed God, when God had expressly referred them to himself and his charity. This may often occur, but St James does not so strongly express it; he makes the uncharitable brother, who will not himself give, merely say—*Go in peace!* be of good cheer, all will be well, some one will help thee (but not I); so be warmed and be filled! But this, on the other hand, makes the mere saying all the more foolish. By speaking and promising, by wishing and consoling—Be warmed and filled! no man can ever be warm and full. Suppose all acted thus in their sympathising love! Assuredly, thy assurance—I wish thee well helped! is a lie, if thou dost not thyself help the poor man, according to thy ability. Thy dispatching him with such a *Go in peace!* is a bitter and unmerciful mockery. Now the application, from love which essentially shows itself in act, to faith from which the love of the heart must proceed:—*So also faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself.* In the former case, it was a giving to others, here primarily a receiving for ourselves; here *we* are before God's compassion the naked and the hungry, but He clothes and fills our inner man with righteousness. What helps it, and what does it mean, if any man should say to God—I thank Thee for Thy gift and grace! while He *receives* it not? So the faith which remains in sins, and has no good works. In whom and in what dost thou then believe? In God, in thy Lord and Saviour, in His word—Thy sins are forgiven thee! Now the same Lord who says that to thee, gives in and with that word a new power and a new life unto righteousness. As little as the repentance which, hoping to be forgiven, would continue in sin, is sincere, so little can the faith in forgiveness be a genuine faith in Him who utters it, if it do not embrace the words which He always utters at the same time—Sin no more! Tarry lying no longer, but rise up and

walk! In forgiveness itself is the re-establishment into a new life contained. Mere faith, without previous merit, justifies as being a faith which cannot in the future remain a mere faith. If the penitent robber had not died, he would not have gone and performed the old deeds. Thus the saying before men, to ourselves, even to God, that we have faith, but without works, St James rightly calls a *dead believing*; that is, because it is a contradiction in itself, the mere semblance and delusion of believing, even as the corpse is not a living and real man. Either thou art yet dead, and so speaking about believing which yet is a living; or, thy faith, which was alive at first, has died again—the mere so-called "believing" *of itself alone* remains no better than a corpse. Who does not see clearly that St Paul and St James here carry on each his divine discourse in the same spirit, and with the same meaning? To people who glory in the works *of the law* (mark well this word in the saying to the Romans!) in opposition to faith, St Paul says—Your *dead* works before and after regeneration avail and help nothing; only *living* faith creates the true works! To people who stand stiffly upon a so-called believing, St James says—Your *dead* faith, without power and life, is of no worth; but the *living* works must come from believing!

He then goes on to take another case for further conviction; and sets against the vain speaker another *some one*, and what he might have to *say* on the other hand. Who is this "man" in St James' meaning? It has been very incorrectly supposed that he intended a Christian, a genuine Christian who had works as well as faith. But, so taken, the entire saying of this second man to the former is misunderstood; and we fail to observe the humiliation through men first, which is then followed by a humiliation through the devils. Why then should the Christian brother—contrary to the exercise of love—so hardly and so mockingly require from the other the showing of his faith? To what end generally this *showing*, if it is not a contender against faith who requires it? And *that* this man evidently is, for he places himself in opposition, and says—*Thou* hast faith, and *I* have works; thou holdest to the "believing," but I to the works—we have our several religion and righteousness. Thus it was at that time a pharisaical Jew opposed to the Christian; now it is a moralist and man of virtue, who,

with his good works, thinks he needs not to believe in the grace of Christ Jesus. Now, the confessor of the name of Christ would convert such a man to *his own* "believing:" how will that be possible, if he is a mere champion of faith with the lips? The man of works justly mocks him, and demands demonstration which should put to shame *his own* "works." "Am I to yield to thee? *Show* me thy faith! Prove to me that it is something, and more than what I have!" Here it is to be lamented that the German Bible has not exhibited the only right reading — "Show me thy faith *without* thy works!" *Without the works*—that is in the doctrine of the Apostle Paul the keenest expression; it is this which is so sadly misused in a dead faith; as if the addition could be intended for the *faith*, instead of being connected with the *justification* (without reference to the merit of works). The ironical record hits the point well, "Show me *any kind* of faith which is a power and feeling of the heart; show me *thy* faith *without* works—if such a thing be possible! I cannot penetrate thy heart; words in this matter are of no avail; without thy works I know nothing of thy faith!" Is not this, brethren, taken from the life for ourselves in our own day? We *ought* to let the light of our faith shine before the world, especially before the self-righteous; and *show* them the power of God within us—but how otherwise than in the works and fruits of our faith? If I have them not, I am mocked of him whom I ought to overcome and convince; by my vain talk he is offended and strengthened in his delusion, so that through me the name of the Lord may by him be blasphemed. "Thou sayest, I believe! My symbol runs much better—I do! There I am thy master: what thou canst not, I can; but I am not bound first to bring demonstration to such a fool as thou art. *First* make thou that nothing possible, to show me thy faith without works; *then* (so he goes on to mock) will I also show thee *my* 'faith,' that is, my religion, my heart's disposition before God and relation to Him; and I will indeed, *by my works*, prove to thee that my faith, which has works (although thou condemnest it as unbelief), is the right faith, better than thine, and is the true religion, because effectual in the life!" Observe, that the opponent is not such a fool as to be ignorant that works come from the heart, and have their foundation or source in the heart's faith. Assuredly,

right doing comes only from right believing; but it is that which *we* should show to them, as our righteousness of life must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. If we cannot, our vain boasting of faith must, to the dishonour of God, strike its sails before the honourable natural man.

And even the example of the *devils* convinces and condemns us: that is the sudden and striking progression in St James' argument. "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils believe that, and tremble." A fearfully telling expression; and yet the pure truth as it respects this perverted use of the word *believing*, which the Apostle by adopting would utterly overthrow. He thereby exhibits a faith in the Lord, which only knows and holds firmly that this Lord exists, without receiving anything from Him, without really receiving from Him the gift of grace. Here St James goes back in his example from the second article (as our Catechism says) to the first. For it is with believing in Jesus as it is with believing in God; rather, in the former the true faith in God finds its consummation.

The merely being convinced of the *being* of God, the one God in opposition to the gods—on which many a *believing* Pharisee without *works* prided himself, and which therefore was included by St James—is of no avail at all! That all sinners know or believe in their secret hearts; even the fools who would say if they could—Let there be no God! Even the devils cannot deny it. They even *believe* it, and are not thereby saved! St James, however, would say more than this, and intimate further—The devils also know that there is a Son of God, a Saviour of men; they know Jesus well; they knew the "Holy One of God" better and sooner than men did—as we read in St Mark's Gospel. Had they on that account salvation from Him? No more than thou, who magnifiest the Saviour, but wilt not be saved by Him; thy faith knowing only *to say*—Thou *art* my Saviour! Be not deluded by Satan, who, when he cannot thwart the truth that there is a Christ, persuades people that it is *saving faith* to know and believe as he and his devils know and believe! O how utterly vain will thy faith then be! Yet not only utterly in vain. For know that the devils believe that God is (and that His Son is)—*and tremble*. Thou, indeed, if thou didst believe in Jesus Christ in

such wise as to receive His grace for thyself, shouldst *love* Him, and joyfully *serve and obey Him.* Art thou without that, and moreover without any trembling fear of the judgment of the Lord—and thus worse than the devils, whose faith works something in them at least, the spirit of fear?—That certainly St James did not mean to say; for no man can be worse than the devils. But this he would say—There is in thy *dead*, powerless, and uninfluential believing a frightful *self-deception*, which alone could render it possible for thee to name the name of Christ without declining from unrighteousness, and without fearing the final judgment. Woe to thee, when at last this self-deception is decided;—what *trembling* with the devils, when the righteous Judge, who knows of no faith without works, shall require, in awful earnest and without any mockery, as it is here predicted—*Show Me* thy faith with thy works! Then will thy so-called faith, thy *saying* thou hast faith, not save thee, but be thy *condemnation.* Thou wast no devil, but a man who might have been, and should have been, renewed by love unto the return of love; but though thou *knewest*, thou *wouldst* not, and that is thy condemnation with the devils.

But no more now on this subject. We only ask in conclusion: Wherefore was this set before those who by the grace of God maintained their faith, without this deadness of heart? In order that they might take the warning not to lose their grace; that they might most diligently guard themselves in individual and lesser matters against all words unaccompanied by works, all imaginations without truth and power. Similarly, that we might all receive the exhortation against a stiff, one-sided standing upon words, as if the truth of salvation must be for all occasions and times embraced in the same formulas and kinds of speech. Let us leave room for the so-called legalists, and for those who are more free; provided the legalists mean the law of liberty, and the free are not unto God without the law of Christ! Let every man be more and more persuaded in his own mind. Let us tolerate the anxious, who speak only of their weakness and guilt, and the joyful, who dance under the impulse of their sanctified confession—if only each has received from above the measure of his strength and truth. It is no contradiction, that the one has faith with works, and the other works from faith; let each learn from the other, that he may

not forget what is essential to one and the other. May the Spirit of truth guard us all against false self-contentment, either in faith without the works, or in works without faith—from both of which the doctrine of St James is equally far removed!

XVII.

THE WORKS OF ABRAHAM'S AND RAHAB'S FAITH.

(Ch. ii. 20–26.)

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Thou seest how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect. And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also, was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Once more, and for the third time, St James utters the great declaration—*that faith without works is dead!* And why should not this be received as the fullest, clearest truth? The whole of Scripture agrees with him; for *that* faith which it requires and commends, to which it attributes righteousness and salvation, is a living, real, influential, fruitful faith. Luther meant no other than this, though, on account of the good and well-intended word of his system "faith *alone*," he could not relish the doctrine of the Epistle of St James. He himself speaks, in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans, precisely as St James speaks in our text. "O it is a living, quick, mighty thing this faith; so that it is impossible but that it should do all good things without intermission. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question could be asked it does them, and is always doing them. He who does not these good works is a man without faith: he is looking about him for faith and good works, but knows neither the one nor the other—all his words about them are idle babbling.

Faith is a living confidence in the grace of God, so confident that it would die a thousand deaths in reliance on it. And this confidence and knowledge of the grace of God maketh the heart merry and alert towards God and all His creatures. Hence man is free without force to do what is right, to serve every one, to bear all sufferings, out of love to God, and in His praise who hath shown him such grace: yea, it is *impossible to separate works from faith*, as impossible as to separate burning and shining from fire."

St James has already shown that the *speaking* of believing, without the power and demonstration of works, is only a mask and a lie; he has shown it from the nature of the case itself, as illustrated by the similitude of love, by the mocking rejoinder of the other man who had works, by the trembling and useless faith of the devils. Nevertheless, as if he had not demonstrated it as yet, he proceeds again, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" Thou *vain* man; that is, thou *faithless* man, as Luther says, thou empty man, puffed up by vainglorying, without the truth and power of faith in the heart, whose words are nothing, but come from an empty and hollow soul. *Wilt* thou not know and acknowledge what I have said? Or, rather, must thou not see its truth, when it is really so with thee and thy dead faith? Thou wilt not surely deceive thyself in the matter of thy salvation? This is the question which I urge—Wilt thou? For he who will not cannot be convinced; even though the truth is as near to him as his own heart. O reader, art thou still such a vain man—then yield up thy will now first to know the truth, which may point thee from thy Nothing to the Something that truly avails! Art thou by the grace of God no longer such—then learn from St James how thy faith may be continually strengthened, and how thou must speak to the vain men whom thou wouldst bring to true knowledge.

Out of *Holy Scripture*, from its history and examples, St James takes the strongest argument, which he had reserved for the last. But will a vain man be likely to be more effectually convinced by Scripture, after he has rejected what went before? One might think it would not be so; but St James knew better the power of the letter of Scripture even over such people. And it is remarkable that so it is! Great is the force of every

word given of God! As the proud Jews in those days still hung upon their Bible, and were to be laid hold of by its conviction, so also are all vain Christians of that time and of this, who wrongly glory in their faith as the Pharisees did in their works. Their argument about faith, they take from the Scripture which speaks of the righteousness of faith. Indeed, they misunderstand and pervert the Scripture; but the same Scripture must be brought to show that they do so. And the word of God has made provision that every error and misunderstanding may be refuted out of itself. *We* may send the faith-Pharisees to the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, and expound to them the sayings which they abuse in their true spirit and connection there; but St James in his day could not do that, and therefore goes back to the Old Testament. *Two examples* taken from it he places in their true light. First, naturally, the great example of *Abraham*, whom he calls, with Israel after the flesh and the church of Christ after the Spirit, *our father;* for he is, and must ever be, the father of believers. Thus the same great example which St Paul adduces, in the Epistle to the Romans, to oppose the dead works of the law, St James likewise employs as against a dead faith: probably with conscious intention, or led by the Spirit, to provide beforehand against the perversion of New-Testament Scripture also. And by his side he places the harlot *Rahab*, whose position in the history, as we shall see, is variously important in this question, and whose *faith* St Paul commends to the Hebrews.

Was not Abraham, our father, *justified by works?* St James lays down this position—which now *first* literally opposes the doctrinal language of the Apostle Paul, and *seems* to contradict the testimony of Scripture itself concerning the righteousness of Abraham through faith—in his bold question as a certain truth, which was incontrovertibly attested and illustrated in the whole history of Abraham's character and life. And how does he demonstrate it? By an effectual stroke he at once mentions the last, greatest, mightiest work of Abraham's faith—when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar! Even we, brethren, who may rightly speak a little of the works of our faith, are far from reaching the point of this sacrifice of the father of believers. What are the sacrifices which God, testing the genuineness of our faith, has required of us, in comparison of that

only-begotten son, on whose life the whole promise to Abraham seemed to rest? And have we made the sacrifices demanded of us with the same obedience? How slow has been our heart to submit, when God has *taken* from us some bosom-child of our love, some object of our hope—altogether unable to give up of ourselves the gift demanded, as Abraham gave up Isaac! And you, whose faith is mere empty delusion, how do you strive against God, instead of trusting and obeying Him, when He requires of you the sacrifice of the least things! St James might have adduced, when speaking of the *works* of Abraham, his whole life from the beginning to the end. His exodus in obedience to God's command was a first work of his faith, even as we are called to do likewise in going out from the world and self. And let us call to mind how he everywhere bore testimony and made his confession, building altars and proclaiming the name of the Lord—how full he was of peace to Lot, yet how valiant against the kings—how humble he was before the priest of the Most High God, and yet how proudly unselfish before the king of Sodom—how hospitable in his service to every traveller to his tent in Mamre. But in this, that he offered his son Isaac, was exhibited his highest and noblest work. Moreover, St James, summing up all in this last, makes it prominent, because this evidence of Abraham's faith by his works had not to do with men, but only with his God. Only before God, in secret mystery—until it was afterwards made manifest—this most proper work of faith was done; but it was truly a *work*, an *act*, in which Abraham's whole faith and life was summed up and approved. What St Paul says is true, in its deepest principle—"*By faith* Abraham offered up Isaac, when he was tempted" (Heb. xi. 17). But God *tempted* him that he might demonstrate his faith by such a *work:* He said also to Abraham —Show Me thy faith! If thou believest in Me and My word, canst thou do this also?

The same God requires of all His believers; everywhere in His word, and in every man by His Spirit's voice. St Paul requires works at the close of all his Epistles, after he has previously established the doctrine of faith. We must always be ready, when called by God, to say with Abraham—*Here I am!* Here is my faith in Thee and Thy word, O Lord; Thou shalt find it, when Thou seekest and triest it! I am Thine, and dedi-

cated to Thee, with all that I have and am, for Thou hast become my God! For, that first word of grace from God in which we believe, "I am thy God!" includes always within it, "and art thou Mine!" The first faith, which embraces this, has laid itself under this blessed obligation. Thus *obedience* is an absolute necessity in believing! Obedience, even when God's commandment appears to be hard and incomprehensible, and even a contradiction to His promise; in that must approve itself our *trust* that God is right, and will maintain right. Thus Abraham gave up the same only-begotten son, of whom it had been said—In Isaac shall thy seed be called! He received him back again for a type; but he had actually given him up in all earnestness of will and act when he laid his bound son on the altar and stretched out his hand to slay him:—that St James means in the expression, "when he offered him *upon the altar*." It is the altar of faith, of the worship of God in faith, on which we also present *our works* to God, the works which He requires in His tests and trials. If we are justified through faith, that righteousness shows and consummates itself only by *works*. Our Lord Himself taught the same when He said, in opposition to the vainglorying of the Jews—If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham! (John viii. 39).

St James might now have passed at once to his conclusion —*Ye see then*, that a man is justified by works, and not by faith *alone*. That is, not by the works of the law, the dead works, to which St James no more than St Paul attributes any value. That is, also, at first *not justified merely* by faith, which actually alone can establish and renew the sinner into a righteousness which avails before God, which God requires from us, and beholds in us at first only as faith and confidence in the word of His grace. But that is, once more: not by a *mere faith*, which should be without strength and influence, and therefore might remain without works; for, as certainly as the word of God's grace cannot be a mere arbitrary declaration that the sinner is righteous, but is living and mighty, the seed of regeneration—so certainly does the new righteousness of the accepted man consummate and approve itself in the new works of his faith.

In order to make this quite clear, St James prepares for his

conclusion from Abraham's example by a few mediating clauses. Thou seest then, *that faith wrought together in his works, and by works was his faith made perfect.* In fact, he who seeth this, seeth the matter rightly; he who understands *these* words of St James, understands the profound unity of the different aspects of the doctrine of faith and works—their inseparability, whether in Abraham or in any other believers. This saying contains—as some one has said—"the formula of solution for this apparent contradiction: faith creates works, works perfect faith." *Faith* remains incontrovertibly the beginning, source, and ground of all. But this justifying faith is so great and mighty a thing, that it does not in us poor sinners attain its *perfection* so rapidly and at once; we begin to believe in weakness, there is yet unbelief present in us. The great task of this faith is to transform the whole man; so that, penetrated by faith and entirely renewed, he should be finally and in perfect truth *made righteous.* Consequently, there must be a gradual exercise and strengthening, testing and confirmation of faith; the same with which the Epistle set out. If there were no faith, whence could the works come? For the works of the natural man, because they have no faith in them, are dead in themselves. But, again, where no works issue from it and follow, the faith must assuredly perish and die out: they are the oil which feeds the lamp in burning. So must faith *work with*, co-operate in, the works—that is, help to good works, create these works through its living power and influence. He that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin! (Jas. iv. 17). And in the great sin, that we know and do not, we all lie involved by nature—as Rom. vii. teaches us. We have neither desire nor power to do good; faith gives us both. And while that faith is thus exercised and confirmed in works, it becomes stronger and stronger, and thus is finally by works *made perfect.* That is, again, not as if anything from the works externally is added to faith; but that which is not of faith is sin (Rom. xiv. 23). Therefore St James by no means says that by the works faith is made living, brought out, created, or the like; for faith cometh through the power of the word, when that enters into us and is embraced by us—and through nothing else. But faith *becomes perfect* in the works; according to St Paul's doctrine, or the Lord's words to him—that the strength of God is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. xii. 9).

The power of faith, indwelling from the outset, and in the first laying hold of grace altogether received, becomes perfectly manifested, approved, and its influence perfected. Thus our calling and election is, in the diligence of life and action, *made sure* (2 Pet. i. 10). So was Abraham's first calling made sure by his last works; and the word concerning righteousness by faith, which had been before spoken to him, was thus confirmed and demonstrated by fact to be a truth.

This alone is what St James means, when he profoundly and wisely continues—And the Scripture was *fulfilled* which said, Abraham *believed* God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. It is far from his desire to abolish or overturn this word; he rather shows it to us, in Abraham, in the fulfilment and consummation of its truth. When Moses records this justifying sentence of God upon Abraham, there was no action performed; faith seized God's word—So shall thy seed be! as now our faith the word—Thy sins be forgiven thee! Thou shalt not die, but live! But there follows in this new life the abundance of works in order to the perfection of faith. Not as a believer without works, but as one united to his God in the confidence of obedience and love, could father Abraham receive the name of honour—*a Friend of God*. This is the name which the Arabs, who boast of their descent from him, give him to this day. It is true that the expression is not literally found in any one place of Scripture; the apocryphal passage, Judith viii. 19, has it merely in a later translation, although with reference to a phrase common in the land. The whole history of Abraham, as recorded by Moses, exhibits him to us as a confidential friend of God, with whom He conversed as a man with his friend. When, for example, the Lord said—How can I conceal from Abraham the thing which I do? (Gen. xviii. 17), we may naturally think of Christ's saying—The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends, for I have made known unto you all (John xv. 15). This is, and must ever be, the name and the honour of Abraham in the history of men. In the Prophet the Lord calleth to His people—Thou seed of Abraham, *My beloved!* (Is. xli. 8); and so prays Jehosaphat—Didst thou not, O God, give this land to the seed of Abraham, *Thy beloved?* (2 Chron. xx. 7). He was a lover of God! God indeed loved him first, but that he might afterwards love Him

in return. So is it with all believers, and so with us. Could the love of God remain in those who love Him *not*, and who give not themselves and all that they have to Him? Is God a God of the dead? a Friend and Saviour of sinners remaining in their sins? Ye are (and continue) My friends, if you do whatsoever I command you! saith the Saviour of sinners in the New Testament to His chosen ones, that they might bring forth fruit (John xv. 14). If Abraham had not spoken in the act—Here am I! but—I cannot give Thee up Isaac, O Lord! would he then have been called the Friend of God?

Likewise, was not the harlot *Rahab* justified by works, when she received the messengers, and sent them out another way?—Rahab, a Gentile of a cursed seed, the abominations and iniquities of which had become full, so that the land spued out its inhabitants, and the Lord could deal with them only in sheer destruction! But *by faith* she was not lost with the unbelievers, when she received the spies in peace (Heb. xi. 31). By the side of Abraham stands her name now in high heaven! She is joined to Israel, like Ruth the Moabitess, over whom Boaz testified—The Lord reward the work (of thy faith and love); and may thy recompense (like Abraham's) be perfect from the Lord, the God of Israel, under the shadow of whose wings thou art come to trust (Ruth ii. 12). Thus it was to faith in the power and goodness of the true God to which Rahab's heart, not daringly presumptuous like that of the other Canaanites, was opened. But her commencing faith, too, was confirmed at once, as was natural and necessary, by her *acting* accordingly; so that likewise, *similarly*, her example approves the rule—by works! Indeed she was a weak woman, not a man of great and strong faith like Abraham; trained up among the godless Canaanites, and hitherto living in shameless whoredom, quenching all sense of purity. Therefore the first act of her faith was not so great as Abraham's exodus, it was not free from hesitation and dissembling: she hid the men, and said—They went hence, and I know not whither they have gone! (Josh. ii. 5). But in this very thing St James gives us a comforting truth out of Scripture, the counterpart and gentler aspect of the Isaac-offering demanded of us. God demands not of the feeble at the beginning the great works of consummate faith; He beholds even in the imperfect act the faith which prompts it, if faith is actually ope-

rating in its performance. *Abraham* and *Rahab* stand in this chapter of St James, in more ways than one, contrasted. In his case, it is a work before the face of God, prepared for in the long practice of the obedience of faith. In her case, it is an act towards men for God's sake, in which the confidence shows itself still fearful; but it is faith in God, and therefore love to His messengers therein. In his case, it is the high goal and end of the works of faith (for with the offering of Isaac Abraham's history closes; he could do no greater thing; his faith was perfected in this work). In her case, it is the weak commencement of the demonstration of a faith now beginning to exist. Rahab received the messengers of the true God, before she herself was received of Him; but therefore her reward was sure, so that she was not only preserved in life, but received more grace unto salvation, for the sake of her vigorous first faith. And with her we may compare those who are disposed to come out of the world and enter among the people of God, who receive the disciples of Christ and give them food in His name, because they are His disciples (Matt. x. 42). But how much more should *we*, beloved, who have already received the full grace, approve in act the truth of our faith and of our love towards those who are sent to us of our Lord! "Wherefore receive ye one another, even as Christ received us to the glory of God" (Rom. xv. 7).

Where such works are *not* found, the solemn concluding words of St James hold irreversibly good—As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. Without spirit and the breath of life through the soul within, the body is no longer a body, but a corpse, having the semblance of life, but carrying within it corruption. Such sepulchres are the Pharisees, with their work of hypocrisy, and without faith in the heart; but much worse and fouler are the dead bodies which lie about faith, and give no evidence of the life of faith by works. Properly speaking, *faith* is the health or spirit of life; and the body may be likened to works, or the walk. But for the perverse St James must invert the figure, and draw his conclusion from without to within: "Where is then the breath in the body, if the body does not move, and walk, and act? Show that your faith is a living body, a spirit in the body, through the demonstration of the spirit and of power in works!"

Thus a dead faith is a lie and a contradiction; like a body without breath, a life without feeling and motion.

XVIII.

NOT EVERY MAN A TEACHER.

(Ch. iii. 1, 2.)

My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

With the third chapter St James seems to begin something new, without specific expression of connection; but it only seems so, for his Epistle is thoroughly well arranged throughout. From the conviction of impatience, and disobedience, and presumption, and the denunciation of a mere profession of faith without the works of faith, the transition is obvious to one great expression of that evil spirit, the premature zeal to become teachers. It has been remarked that St James, setting out in his Epistle with true *wisdom* in *patience* under trial, as the proper test of a faith which must be approved, and returning to the same point at its conclusion, adheres throughout the middle of it to the great theme laid down in ch. i. 19—"Swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to wrath." To be *doers* of the word and not hearers only, or rather in deed and truth *rightly to hear*—is the point to which all, from ch. i. 22 to the end of the second chapter, refers. He now rebukes more distinctly the prurience and sin of the tongue in its *swift speaking;* and continues this into exhortations against *wrath,* against envy and contention, warfare and quarrelling, slandering and condemnation of brethren.

That we cannot and should not all be teachers, might be a thing taken for granted generally, and especially in every church of believers; for it is no small matter to be a householder faithful and wise, whom the Lord sets over His household! (Luke xii. 42). There are always many not called to this, in contrast with the few called; hence St James only says—

Be not many of you teachers, by which he means almost the same which Luther's translation has much more strongly expressed. "Ye *many*, ye who are called to the hearing and doing of the word, *become* not, without vocation and out of your own premature will, teachers; undertake not an office to which ye are not called." The Lord alone sends His servants, and sets one of them above the rest. To every one the grace is given according to the measure of the gift of Christ; but all are as members in the body. The Lord has only appointed *some* to be Apostles, some to be prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (Eph. iv. 7, 11). Are they all Apostles? Are they all prophets? Are all teachers? (1 Cor. xii. 29). "Hath God not given thee the *unfrequent* gift of teaching? then be a good hearer, and doer of the work." To the office of teaching belongs a gift of teaching from above: oh that the two were always united! It was so for the most part in the apostolical time; the Apostles themselves, led by the Holy Ghost (as they reserved to themselves the appointment of the first elders in the churches, see Acts xiv. 23), appointed only those whose gifts they knew; and to his son Timothy St Paul rigorously enjoins—That which thou hast heard, commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also (2 Tim. ii. 2). Yet was this not an exclusive authorisation; but, in this season of abundant gifts, the rule for all was—Quench not the Spirit! Despise not prophesying! (1 Thess. v. 19, 20). He whom the Lord's call impelled, and whom the Lord's gift justified and approved, might exercise his gift of speaking and teaching in the church; hence the necessity for this dehortation from a presumptuous usurpation of the office. Nevertheless, there was from the beginning an ordinance whereby *pastors* and teachers were to be specifically set apart to be over the church and acknowledged as such—ruling elders who laboured in the word and doctrine (1 Tim. v. 17). Hence the exhortation—"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves!" (Heb. xiii. 17). Hence the warning here—Not many or all of you should exalt themselves, as if they were *teachers* in vocation and office! But this does not forbid the occasional teaching generally of every person who is capable, in private as in public; we are told—"Ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted" (1 Cor. xiv. 31).

These primitive relations have long been changed: the office of one above the many has become more exclusive; nor could it be otherwise in the present condition of things. We should honour the office, and pay respect to the holy ordinance, even where the appointed teacher has small gift of teaching, and even where he does not utter God's word in its perfect purity. Publicly in God's service only the appointed ministry should be heard; for who does not know the consequences which would ensue from general license in this matter? But there may be many found who are capable, and some who only think they are, of teaching and exhorting in the midst of the church. To forbid or to suppress *this* in itself, as if it were not right, cannot be defended by any well-instructed Christian even of the present day. St James does not intend that his word—which is rather a warning than an express prohibition—should be so applied; we cannot understand it in the sense of the Roman Catholics, who have established an unevangelical distinction between the priesthood and the laity. Every believer has in Christ a portion in the universal priesthood of His people; every man instructed of God in the universal prophetic function. When our Lord says—"Be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren" (Matt. xxiii. 8)—this means, by inverting the words—Every brother should, as a brother, in the name of the Lord, teach others. He who has been made wise out of the word of the Lord may glory with David—I am wiser than my teachers; for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I am wiser than the ancients; for I keep Thy commandments (Ps. cxix. 99, 100). If not in the public assembly, yet in those more select meetings which ought to exist among us, we should exhort one another; and so much the more as we see the day approaching (Heb. x. 25). Exhort *one another* daily! This includes the giving heed whether *any of us* needeth the exhortation (Heb. iii. 12, 13)—for I must love my neighbour as myself. Therefore, in our days as in the apostolical, the truth must be remembered which St Paul intimates, when he places the office of the elders in connection with the universal duty of Christians: "Wherefore exhort yourselves together, and edify one another. Know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord. But we (rulers) exhort *you*, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support

the weak" (1 Thess. v. 11–14). Certainly, we must observe that this kind of exhortation and help is something different from the mere *instruction* in knowledge of which St James is speaking. For if the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all *wisdom*, it is not mere teaching, but a teaching and admonishing (Col. iii. 16); and to this duty all Christians of the present day pressingly need to be stimulated and encouraged. We are as yet very far from the New-Testament promise—"And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest" (Heb. viii. 11). But those who do know Him in the ripeness of experience, ought to be teachers of their weak brethren, and even of the wholly ignorant (Heb. v. 12).

But, after all this, which is not denied, St James warningly shows us the other side of the question, the great danger and heavy responsibility of becoming teachers, especially without vocation and gift from above! In all teaching and exhortation of his brethren which a fallible man may undertake, he must hear the warning—Look to thyself! There is indeed a spiritual work for the truly spiritual, which can only be accomplished through the power which God giveth, and which demands much wisdom, prudence, patience, and love. But for that office which St James means, the continuous work of office and life as *teachers* of others, teachers of all the knowledge of the whole word of truth—who is sufficient for this? Who can think that he will accomplish it without lapses, error, and sin! Truly it may be said—Know, consider, and forget not, that we shall receive *the severer judgment!* For our own souls the judgment will be severe and heavy: Who would thoughtlessly take it upon him to stand for the souls of others? It is said generally, Many are called, but few chosen; but who would call himself, and thereby the more surely fall into condemnation? *Many*, however, did so then, and many, alas! do so now. Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, cried, "Let me now run," and would not be persuaded that he should find no reward of his errand: he clung to his own words, "Howsoever, let me also run!" (2 Sam. xviii. 19–23). Such teachers and runners, who are not sent, are plentiful enough. These are not the true teachers and masters who will shine as the brightness of the firmament (Dan. xii. 3)—evil will be their lot in the end. Their teaching is unapt and unblessed; it

cannot turn any to righteousness, for it comes itself from unrighteousness, and of the presumption and vanity of the evil heart. Be subject one to another in the fear of God! Serve one another! is the language of the Spirit; but the flesh perverts it—Exalt yourselves into dominion over each other! The impulse to show ourselves wiser than others, and to be teachers, urges the natural man from childhood upwards; and in too many Christians it is marvellously strong through life. Suppress all such presumptuous outgoings in your children; suppress it also in yourselves; quench *your own* spirit! Here lies the way to error and ruin: how often is it that, the more a man would teach others, the more he forgets himself; the less he will be taught himself, the less he will refrain his own feet from every evil way that he may keep God's word (Ps. cxix. 101) —the more ready he is to teach others the way! All such do their mischief, and shall receive their reward. And the warning against it is addressed to us *all.*

For—in many things we fail *all!* If any man fail not in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. This is a general truth; and one which is very solemn and humbling, when we think of the coming judgment. *In many things we all fail!* It is true that the careless pervert this saying as well as that other—We are altogether sinners! But our conscience tells us plainly that the words were not given for our excuse and false security. The *failing* of the regenerate is no longer a wilful sinning: it is not written—In many things we must and we may offend! but—Therefore take the more earnest heed, that ye may receive the less condemnation! We, alas! all fail; we stumble even yet in our work and walk: but every such instance in us, every stumblingblock we cast before others, draws upon us a greater condemnation, if it has been committed by one who undertakes to be a teacher and guide of others. We should indeed show our faith by our works, and not without works; in order that we may not mislead others by our example, and teach a dead faith. Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Who would be a teacher? Let him before all things show his own works in a good conversation! So speaks St James afterwards in ver. 13.

What a condemnation will fall upon the wicked, whom St Paul, Rom. ii. 19–23, has described and already judged!

"Thou art confident that thou art thyself a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou teachest others, and teachest not thyself. Thou preachest a man should not sin, and sinnest thyself. Thou makest thy boast in the law, and through breaking of the law dishonourest God." How much greater the condemnation of those who, still worse, elevate themselves into teachers of the *gospel*, and themselves are not obedient to the gospel! Or, are there none such? Our Lord, in His parable, Matt. xxii., brings forward two classes of those not chosen—Such as come not at all, and such as come without the wedding-garment. But we may go further, and include others who are not mentioned there: such as help to invite the guests without being themselves sent, without having themselves received aright the invitation. They stop the way of the servants, and do much mischief. They dispute, and teach subtleties, up to the very door, concerning the wedding-garment, which they recommend to others without putting it on themselves. They have much to say about its value, and how it is wrought, and the like—but *they* remain unclothed, and do not really help others to enter. A heavy condemnation will rest upon them, even if—and all the more, if (which, however, is not possible!)—their whole teaching had been correct, according to the *form* of knowledge and of truth.

But St James continues, If any man fail not in word, he would be a perfect man—which we all of us are not. And for *teachers*, it is the right and true *word* which is here concerned! Primarily, the right word, as a word not merely of truth, but of love, with all *meekness* of wisdom, with all *patience* of teaching. Words of contention and pride, or impatience, always ruin all. But here Sirach speaks like St James—"There is one that slippeth in his speech, but meaneth it not in his heart; and who is he that hath not offended with his tongue?" (Ecclus. xix. 16). They angered Moses—the meekest of men upon earth (Num. xii. 3)—at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with him for their sakes. Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips (Ps. cvi. 32, 33). And we are told how often the heathens require of the missionaries meekness and patience, as the test of their doctrine. And how

will it be with thee, O thou vain, presumptuous, self-called teacher, when such unadvised words the more abundantly fall from thee, because thou *dost* mean them in thy heart? Those who cannot love should not teach. "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work;—there is no favourable culture for the good seed. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (Jas. iii. 14, 16, 18). The great matter before and in all instruction is ever the gracious exhortation. The Lord sends His servants—*Say unto* the guests, even those who would not come; say unto them again and again, with kindness and constraint. The ambassadors in the stead of Christ, constrained by His love, should prove by their own spirit that God is persuading through them; they should *entreat* in Christ's stead (2 Cor. v. 20). This is the word of reconciliation in the many words of unwearable love. And what have those *contentions about words* to do with this, which presumptuous teachers are always so ready to begin and continue, and which are good for nothing but the *perverting* of the hearers? (2 Tim. ii. 14). What have the school-disputings of men to do with this, who think that godliness is gain? (1 Tim. vi. 5). And what the useless questions, which have no end and aim, which minister no godly edifying in faith? (1 Tim. i. 4). But there are some teachers who, while free from these faults, are not free from others: with good intention, and zeal for God, their word of teaching offends by urging knowledge beyond the capacity of their scholars, by giving them meat too strong, by beginning with what should be the end, by enforcing particular truths to the detriment of the whole truth—and so forth. Is it not very possible in this way to injure, instead of helping, souls, and thus to come into condemnation? But we should *teach* sinners only that we may *convert* them from the error of *their way*, and help to save their souls from death (Jas. v. 20).

If this is to be perfectly accomplished, the simple exhortation must be followed by the teaching and expounding of the whole counsel of God, the leading them into the knowledge of the entire, complete, and rich, fulness of truth; then ask thyself humbly—Am I sufficient for this? O how easily may we offend and be wanting here! The proud learned in their chairs,

the Christian Scribes, who are called disputers of this world (1 Cor. i. 20), may think themselves to be infallible popes; but let all who would labour in the word and doctrine know and remember what that means—"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *rightly dividing* the word of truth"—distributing it in its manifold words! (2 Tim. ii. 15). Let him not dispute about the contrasts and paradoxes of words, which are one and united in the spirit of their meaning; let him strive, according to circumstance and opportunity, to minister to the right man the right truth, according to the various gradations of the experience of the people whom he teaches! What a task is this, in which we all, in many respects, fail! If a man is deeply conversant with the word of doctrine, having constant practice and experience; if he has nothing else to do but to investigate truth in Scripture and in the hearts of men, in the word and in the history of the kingdom of God (which, in many cases, is the first opener and expositor of the word);—then surely the brother in the church should yield to such a man, even though he confess himself not as yet to be perfect; modestly considering how likely he is himself to fail and offend in very many words, not having such a school, such opportunities, such unbroken exercise, and such experience! "*We* all fail in many things"—in this confession St James includes himself, to the shame of the self-exalting brethren. Not as if he submitted any errors in his Epistle, written as it was through the Holy Ghost, to their criticism or ours; but he only maintains that, in ordinary life and independently of his office, the perfect man, who no longer offends in any word, is nowhere to be found. The Apostles themselves were not, in their daily and hourly private life, sinlessly holy and infallible: only for their office had they the promise of the Holy Spirit to keep them from all error. Only in their office, and with relation to all the fundamental verities of their embassage, was it said to the Seventy as to the Twelve—He that heareth you, heareth Me! (Luke x. 16). St Paul was sure that he did not, like many, corrupt the word of God, but was as of sincerity, as of God, speaking in the sight of God in Christ (2 Cor. ii. 17). But he humbly distinguishes the influence of the Spirit of God from that of his own spirit; and testifies—I will not dare to speak—as a servant of Christ and

teacher of the Gentiles—of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me (Rom. xv. 18). Thus it is not the fault of *St Paul*, who rightly taught the doctrines of faith and works, according to the wisdom given to him, and it will not be his condemnation, that from the beginning his words have been perverted to the greatest abuse. It is not the fault of Luther, nor will it be his condemnation, so far as he taught in harmony with St Paul. But has not a condemnation, though a merciful one, fallen upon *Luther*, for much table-talk to the offence of posterity, for many hard and bitter words in his polemical writings? Was he not constrained to confess upon his deathbed that he carried his doctrine of the Sacrament too far?—too far, indeed, as the evil fruits of that bitter root are teaching us to this day. When we mark this in such high examples, how should such weak and insignificant men as we are shrink from any responsibilities which the Lord Himself does not impose upon us, and His Holy Spirit does not prepare us for! It is relatively an easy matter to the sincere heart of a brother, full of love, to exhort and admonish; but hard, perilous, and responsible, is the proper office of an appointed teacher. Mark the thriving errors of the scholars, which are so often occasioned and excused by some slight error in the teacher, who has not prudently enough divided the word of truth. What exaggerations and onesided views are the result! Therefore, let those who must be—and not merely would be—teachers see to it that they *speak* circumspectly, not as fools but as wise! A congregation of Christ needs not *many* masters and teachers; but those whom God sends and equips want scholars and hearers. What state of things would be that in which every man taught, and no man listened? We shall none of us ever cease to need to learn; therefore *let every man be willing to be and remain a hearer!* Always, first, swift to hear; then slow to speak! "Be sure of the matter prepared, then speak thereafter; bind up instruction, and then make answer" (Ecclus. xxxiii. 4). If this is our spirit, the Spirit of the Lord will give His demonstration in our words; we shall then with all humility edify and teach each other, each according to the measure of the gift from above; and then shall we escape the condemnation which awaits presumption and pride.

XIX.

THE SINS OF THE TONGUE.

(Ch. iii. 3–12.)

Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which, though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a wood a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same hole sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree, my brethren, bear olive-berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

"But if any man offend not in any *word*"—seemed to set the *speaking* over against the doing, as the lesser thing; and to make false words the last and least failure in perfection. When, however, St James continues—"He that ruleth the tongue, he, or *only* he, can also govern the whole body," the matter is reversed. The failing or not failing in words is plainly regarded as the decisive, distinctive, mark of our self-government, and of our religious condition generally. To tame and bring into subjection to the spirit the whole body, the whole complex of our inborn sins and lusts, is the duty of us all; but it is specially required of those who come forward as teachers of others—lest they themselves be castaways! (1 Cor. ix. 27). But on that very account they should practise and exhibit it, *in the taming of their tongues*. St James has from the beginning dwelt upon this main point (ch. i. 26, 19); he now gives a new and important discourse upon the subject. Let us carefully study his pattern-sermon upon this great and profound theme:

considering the importance which he attaches to the little member; the extent and depth of its unrighteousness as it is here traced; and finally, the wisdom which alone will save us from the sins of the tongue.

Such is the wonderful significance attached here to the words which the little tongue speaketh, that many are disposed to think it an exaggeration, and to regard St James himself as offending, through his zeal, in these high words and figures. But what he says is the pure truth; uttered so emphatically in order to shame our thoughtlessness on the matter, and to condemn the gentle strain of preaching on the sins of the tongue which is so current. He begins wisely with allusion to something very acceptable to the ears of proud man—giving its glory to that might and skill of mankind which subjugates and rules so wide a domain. But he refers to this, only in reality to humble us the more! Behold, we put bits into the *horses' mouths*, so that they obey us, and we can turn their whole body. The strong and noble horse—the symbol of all animal nature which man has subjected to his service, since it is not our greater power which reduces him, but our understanding how to apply the instrument of our dominion *in the right place*. How does the lightest movement of our hand turn the whole animal, so that the rider upon his horse seems to make one whole with him; the horse being almost like an addition to the man's own body! Behold also the *ships*, which are so great, and are moreover driven of fierce winds, are turned by a very small rudder whithersoever he will who is the steersman. This, again, is an example of man's art in machinery for reducing to subjection inanimate nature, and the very elements. We ourselves have made the ships so great, and at the same time with so much art; but St James would now make prominent the navigating art, which not only uses the strong winds in their natural direction, and not merely withstands them, but can even in some degree make them subservient to an almost opposite course.

Wind and sea thus become obedient to men; and now steam on the ocean has introduced the service of a third element, that of fire. What now do we expect naturally to follow? Obviously, the declaration that we ought also to be able to rule ourselves, and our tongue at least, which is so small a member! But St James strikingly changes the point of the

comparison—*So* is also the tongue—a *little* bit, a *little* rudder; that is, the tongue *rules* rather the course of men and of the world, our tongue drives us, instead of being, as it should be, in our own hand and power; yea, alas, it turns and steers us hither and thither, whithersoever he will *who by it rules over us!* So important is St James' view of the little member which doeth such great things. Literally, *It boasteth great things*, speaking proudly and presumptuously. This has always been true among all classes, from Daniel's beast with the little horn, and the mouth speaking great things (Dan. vii. 8)—and the host of the rebellious who speak proud things, and who say, With our tongues will we prevail! (Ps. xii. 3, 4)—down to the most insignificant rebel who has a mouth as daring as a little antichrist. There is a certain truth and right in this boasting of the tongue—St James means—for the little member worketh great things, for good as well as evil. The importance and power of the *word* in human nature appertains to the *image of God* in which man was created: the word of God created the worlds, and by His mighty word He upholdeth all things (Heb. i. 3). And so the preached word is the seed of our regeneration; and the brethren are commended to the word of grace for their perfect edification unto the final inheritance (Acts xx. 32). The word of grace and truth in human lips founded the church of Christ, and the same word governs and builds it up; the word of testimony and confession works its reformation; even as it is wasted and hindered by words of error. Everywhere and all-mighty is the influence of the word. They who so vehemently demand freedom of speech, know well the power of what they want. How great is the power of human orations over masses of men! How can one single word of appropriate truth light up darkened doctrine; how powerful is one single word of love from the heart to exhort, to strengthen, to encourage, and to stimulate! "Shall not the dew assuage the heat? so is a word better than a gift" (Ecclus. xviii. 16). Again, what might has a wicked word to blight, to mislead, to offend, to wound! You may ask, whether there are not words of mere indifference, of no significance for evil or good, and which made up the far greater part of our daily conversation. Not so; there is no indifferent action, and there are no indifferent words. Because of supposed vain words the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience

(Eph. v. 6). Unspiritual and loose babbling has its effect; it strengthens and confirms the mind from which it comes—it increases unto more ungodliness (2 Tim. ii. 16). The word, in reality, always proceeds either from a good or an evil mind; it always carries in it its proportionate influence, either upon others or ourselves; for it is generally the channel of all spiritual power, utterance, and influence in humanity.

The little member with the great things which depend upon it and spring from it, is like a *little fire*, which kindles a great wood: St James says this specially concerning the evil. Mark the short, scarcely uttered word of wrath, hatred, or bitterness, and what enmity it may excite! A thoughtful word of mockery—what offence, and what endless mischief may proceed from it! A little word of enticement and temptation may open the door to an untold career of sin! An impure witticism may kindle the flames of hateful lust with all its hateful deeds! What boundless mischief is wrought in the world by sinful lips, unguarded sayings, words of hatred and of strife! "A backbiting tongue hath pulled down strong cities, and overthrown the houses of great men. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword; but not so many as have fallen by the tongue" (Ecclus. xxviii. 14, 18). Envious tongues confound and ruin churches, overthrow states, lay waste peoples and lands. Look at that little member, the tongue; is the word which it utters to be lightly esteemed? Think, moreover, of the tongue of our times, of the pen and the might of books and journals—might, alas! too often in the service of evil. He who throws the sparks of his words into the wood of the people cannot say—What have I then done? I have only spoken or written! The inflammable wood is always and everywhere, in natural humanity, prepared for the sparks of falsehood and sin. "What shall the false tongue do to thee? What shall it profit thee? It is like sharp arrows of the mighty, like fire in juniper-woods" (Ps. cxx. 3, 4). The furthest-reaching, the most internal and spiritual, the most influential *influence* of man upon men is so obviously connected with the tongue, that St James needs only to refer to it with a *Behold*, just as to the horses, ships, and woods;—not so much in the acts of men is it seen, as in the *words* which explain, and accompany, excite, and produce those acts. Regard the whole world or mankind in all its doing and pursuits: in words its spirit and life is first dis-

tinctly *shown;* in words its deepest activity *moves;* by *words* is the traffic of spirits in truth and falsehood conducted, and right or wrong done by man to man. And alas! in the *world* as world, alas! in fallen human nature generally, there is now only *iniquity;* thus the tongue, and the fire everywhere kindled in the great wood which proceeds from it, is *a world full of iniquity.* This is no exaggerating expression, but the simple and solemn truth: the tongue of men, speaking evil and falsehood, is the proper instrument and member in the great body of humanity from which the truth-restraining fire of unrighteousness proceeds, which fills the whole world with iniquity, and thus is itself a little world of iniquity. *To that* tend the lightly-considered sins of the tongue!

Whence, then, this world full of unrighteousness in the tongue, which is only a piece of flesh in the mouth? Let us now hear how *profoundly St James bases this evil!* He is not like the moralists, who never press into the internal principle of human behaviour, who never go beyond the superficial work and word; he does not preach like the preachers who have only to say—Do not thus, or speak not so! He knows well that the same *human nature,* which can tame and subject so many things, cannot of itself tame the tongue. For in its word bubbles incessantly the outflow of an abyss in the heart; or a whirling fire burns round about, which ascends from an internal hell. *So is the tongue among our members:* the tongue it is which defiles the whole body, and kindles the *wheel of nature*—if and because it is itself kindled of the *fire of hell.* So deep lies the ground of the evil. There is a *twofold* impulse of speaking and acting, a twofold fire which burns upon the tongue of man, and by it can enkindle flame. The good fire came down on the day of Pentecost from above, from the Father of Lights; but in the depth of human nature there burns another. The same St James who, in ch. i. 17, distinguished the above and below, the pure lights and fixed stars of the original world from the planets revolving in alternate shadows, thus profoundly through the Holy Ghost anticipating a physical knowledge scarcely even yet thoroughly understood, utters here a similar mystery. Luther did not understand the expression, and therefore explained at once—The tongue kindles *all our conduct.* But the word is, literally, the *wheel* or the *revolution* of *nature,* that is, of human nature; so that the whole

world of spirit and thought in the natural man, in his corruption, moves towards unrighteousness, and is whirled round by mighty impulse, like as it were burning windmills—if such a simple figure may be allowed. Is it not so with the tongue once set in motion, that speedily the whole man is hurried away by his own mouth? And where burns, properly speaking, this fire which presses upward to the tongue? In hell, for there is the evil fire. But where is hell? According to Scriptural figure, based upon the reality of nature, in the interior of the earth, where it remains from the former fall of Satan, the first occupier of the earth; and this fire is at the same time the energy which urges the rotation of the revolving planet. All this St James knew, and discerns in nature the figure of the world of spirit; he finds the same reproduced in man as in a little world. In *his* interior, in the ground and abyss of his heart, is hell: there burns the dark fire of contradiction to the truth of God, of the lie derived from the first liar, of wrath and hatred, of the vain lust which idolatrously goes out toward the creature. Sirach from afar had a presentiment of the truth: "The heart of the foolish is like the wheel of a cart; and his thoughts are like a rolling axletree" (Ecclus. xxxiii. 5). But St James here calls it a fire, a hellish fire, that drives this rotation; and shows us in the tongue what may be called the *fly-wheel* of all the revolutions of our natural being in unrighteousness. Thus stands, or is fixed, the tongue among our members! "An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire" (Prov. xvi. 27). It is not, indeed, the mouth that does all, for it is first kindled from the heart; and yet it is the mouth, for the way of the thoughts into acts in the world without is through the mouth. Out of the *heart* proceed the evil thoughts which become wicked works, false witness, and blasphemy; and these are the things which defile a man: what proceedeth out of the mouth defileth the man (Matt. xv. 18–20). So said the Lord Himself, and so, after Him, says St James: the tongue defileth the whole body, it fills the life and the walk with sin and guilt. It is not enough to keep ourselves unspotted from the world without; the tongue also must be held in check, for it is also a world of unrighteousness. Is it not true that the words, themselves the outbreaking sin of the heart, always, when unrestrained, urge us to still greater sin? The wheel of nature

rotates, man *talks* himself into evil, into wrath or lust, into lie or vanity; he prates himself all the more firmly in the sin, against the works of which he would fain guard; the tongue sooner or later runs away with his whole man. As thou art, thou speakest; but it is equally true that, as thou speakest and continuest to speak, thou wilt live and walk. It begins with the tongue; but the fire soon spreads, and unrighteousness spreads widely around. How often, nay, in most instances of fall, have we to say—Had I but restrained the first outburst in word! Had I but tamed my tongue! It *should* not be so with the tongue, St James afterwards says; but here beforehand he attests the mournful truth, that, while every nature of beasts, and of flying fowl, and creeping things such as poisonous serpents, and the wonderful creatures of the sea, are tamed and have been tamed by the human nature,—the tongue can no man tame, that restless, unrestrained evil, full of deadly poison! Who can put bits into the *mouths* of *us* wild horses? Only the Lord God who speaks of the bit and bridle in the psalm (Ps. xxxii. 9). *No man* can tame the little tongue, although vaunted human nature can do so much. All the power, wildness, and poison of all kinds of animals either has been reduced to submission, or will be so; this universal taming proceeds further and further, as St James declares and predicts. But of what avail is this to poor humanity, if it is not of itself capable of a word for righteousness and truth! But so it is everywhere in the world: The tongue can no man tame; not in others, that he may stop their evil mouth with teaching, exhortation, rebuke, and authority; nor yet even in himself. After all the progress of the inventions of man's power and art, the world remains, alas! full of unrighteousness; yea, he that could seize it by the tongue, and keep that still, would be the only restrainer of the world. An unceasing, untamed or *untameable*, evil monster is this tongue, after the manner of serpents full of deadly poison. "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips" (Ps. cxl. 3). We know, indeed, well what this poison is; and that old Serpent, as the warning symbol of whom natural serpents have poison under their tongues. Thus human nature is put to shame, because it has fallen into a worse and hellish nature. In our conflict with, not the sea-monsters, but monsters of the abyss

which have ruined and poisoned us, there is more than the mere contest of nature with nature.

The best thing in this evil is, however, that it does not conceal itself; that the poison, otherwise concealed, flows out most assuredly through the tongue, and reveals its nature even as the fruit reveals the nature of the tree. "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh!" (Matt. xii. 33, 34). This word of our Lord remains for ever true. Look steadily at those honourable and virtuous people, who at least think themselves such, without having had the new and good tree implanted in them; give steady heed to what their tongue speaks and does, and mark how their words testify against them, and how they themselves are continually misled and defiled by their own tongues! When that proud tongue boasts—*I can keep silence, or disguise my meaning*—verily that is the one thing which is too great for it. The aptest hypocrite cannot altogether accomplish that; it cannot be that his deception shall never be betrayed by a single word; the heart must overflow, and the hell within sometimes burn upon the tongue. What we speak is, and must ever be, the most direct, most certain, and most unrestrained outflow of the heart. And what now finally follows in St James' discourse against the sins of the tongue? He has shown us *whither* they tend, in the world full of unrighteousness; and *whence* they come, from the internal abyss of corruption. It is now very easy to understand how alone we may be *saved* therefrom.

Hear and understand aright, how wisely he gives the only *right counsel for our help!* Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing; that should not be, for doth the fountain send forth from the same hole sweet water and bitter? St James once more points us *to within*, as in the first chapter, for the source of good and evil; we should not undertake with fruitless pains to stop the *hole* of the unceasing outflow, but we should seek thoroughly to cleanse the *fountain* and source itself. "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. xii. 35). O *man*, thou art created after the image of God, so that thou canst subdue by thy nature all inferior creatures and natures, so that even in the

wicked power of thy *word* there is manifested a perversion of the Divine image. Should not all creatures praise their Creator; and how much more thou thy God, in whose image thou wast formed? There are only *two* kinds of service and use of the tongue, only two kinds of words and works, intention and act—either the *blessing of God*, or the cursing of man! We might have expected to hear—Or the blaspheming of the same God; and so it is in its ground. But, because St James is speaking to *brethren*, he does not expressly *mention* the direct and open blasphemy against God; nevertheless, he gives it to be understood that he who injures and dishonours man, similarly sins against the image of *God*. His words must be regarded as meaning, that all which serves to the honour of God may be called the blessing God; and, on the other hand, that all scorn and injury of our neighbour, especially in words, may be called cursing, the utterance of wicked and bitter words. He who praises God with the tongue, but not with the heart, who will bear testimony to the truth without purity of soul in its obedience, *lies* against the truth (ver. 14) and blasphemes. He who flatters his neighbour, like the men who are diligent in lies, blessing with their mouth but cursing inwardly (Ps. lxii. 4)—his tongue is a cursing tongue all the more on that account. As Solomon says, "He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him" (Prov. xxvii. 14). With the tongue bless *we*, with the tongue curse *we!* this St James means first of collective humanity: we men thus use the tongue; some bless God with it, others injure their neighbours with it. On which side do you stand? Have you ever yet in truth, and from the ground of the heart, praised God in prayer or thanksgiving, in confession or saving testimony? Or does the fire of pride and wrath, of bitterness, scorn, and injury to your neighbour, burn in you as oft as your tongue has free course? Do you scorn especially the renewed image of God in His children, speaking all kinds of evil of the disciples of Christ in your enmity against truth and righteousness?

We, dear brethren, should certainly only bless God the Father, who hath begotten us again to be first-fruits of His creatures; and only bless our fellow-redeemed with the mercy received from above. But now St James comes closer *to us*,

when he continues with sharper expression—Out of the *same one mouth* cometh blessing and cursing. Ye who would be teachers of others, test and humble your own souls! But, among the brethren generally, where is the one to whom this does not more or less apply? Fearful, lamentable, and unnatural is it that the words of God's praise should mingle and alternate—and within brief intervals out of the same mouth—with wicked and sinful words! Is it not so? Shall we repel St James' saying, and retort his own previous word—He that offendeth in no word would be a perfect man; but we in many things offend all, and it cannot be otherwise?—*My brethren, these things ought not so to be!* is the inexorable reply with which he anticipates us, and it is perfectly justified. There may *seem* to you no counsel for help in this hard—*It ought not to be!* But mark the deep wisdom with which he speaks; take in the conclusion of the sentence, and understand that he gives such counsel as *brethren* ought to be able to receive. If the praise of God cometh out of thy mouth, dost thou not know *whence* that flows? Mark that from the *same source*, and no other, it *should* and *can* come, that thou mayest put an end to the curse which proceeds from the same mouth. If God has begun to heal thee, a poisoned sinner, He will not forsake His work, but help thee still. The tongue can no man tame by *human* nature and power; but can no Christian tame it, no child born of God? Could not St James himself tame his own; must he also curse?

So shall we first understand aright the concluding word with its question, which says more than it expresses, and requires from the wise the right answer. From one spring do sweet waters and bitter come? Can a fig-tree bear olive-berries, or a vine bear figs? *So a salt spring cannot give sweet water!* that is—No inferior creature or nature contradicts its own kind and propriety; but man, the noblest of all creatures, is such a self-contradiction, and therein approves, as his deep corruption, so also his high vocation. The image of God has been fearfully disordered. But, again, if there is in thee, an evil man, something that is good, some certain genuine praise of God coexisting with the still remaining outgrowth of evil, it is the *grace of God* in thee; the Lord hath cast the tree into the bitter waters, as there in Marah, and given thee, as there,

the promise—*I am the Lord that healeth thee!* (Ex. xv. 23–26). However great the sin, God's grace is mightier; but shall we count our evil slight, and not give all diligence to be entirely healed? God forbid! It is both our consolation and our warning to know, and it is the most effectual evangelical stimulant to holiness, that, although alas! good and evil more or less flow together from within, they do not both come from one fountain; that grace is mightier than sin, the Divine nature shall and will most assuredly tame and restrain thy human nature. He that says—This should not be! will make His law within us a law of liberty and life, and give us strength to keep it.

Sigh not out then, brethren, with the son of Sirach your wishes—"*O that I could set* a watch before my mouth, and a seal of wisdom upon my lips, that I fall not suddenly by them, and that my tongue destroy me not! (Ecclus. xxii. 27). O that I could!—but I cannot, no man can." But let it be thy earnest purpose, in the renewed will of thy new nature—"I said I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will muzzle my mouth!" (Ps. xxxix. 2). And then, which is the great concern, let thy watching become prayer for the strength of God—"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my *heart* to any evil thing, but only to the good!" (Ps. cxli. 3, 4). Then that which is impossible is done, if not at once, yet more and more unto perfection; then that perfection is constantly brought nearer; the evil fountain is gradually dried up, the stronger the good fountain flows. And as, in a condition of nature, the untamed tongue seduces the heart, so in a condition of grace the taming of the tongue—that is to say by watchfulness and earnest prayer—is exceedingly helpful to growth in the Divine nature; for thus can man in truth, being under the power of grace, stop the flow of nature and dry up its fountain. He who makes this his earnest and persevering endeavour, will know by sure experience that with us also the *mouth* is the proper place in which to place the bit which curbs the old Adam; that the *tongue* is in sanctification the rudder which steers the whole life. May the Lord help us more and more, that we may not be driven of fierce winds without, but of His Holy Spirit who governeth us; that not the fire of hell, but the fire of heaven, may urge our tongues! Let us ever seek His help with the

determination of our renewed nature—Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me! Praise the Lord, my tongue, and all that goeth out of me! Praise the Lord, my whole life, and every motion!

XX.

THE GENTLENESS OF TRUE WISDOM, AND THE WRATH OF FALSE.

(Ch. iii. 13–16.)

Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthy, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work.

St James teaches us in his Epistle what is genuine faith; and for their sake who *say* that they have faith, but have not the works by which true faith approves, confirms, and consummates itself. What, then, have these men else in them? There must be something on which they pride themselves, and on which they rely. And that is their dead *knowledge*—or, as *they* also say, the discernment of the truth, of which they *say* that it is faith. But this knowledge, the more hollow and empty it is, the more it swells out in *words:* therefore, naturally, with vain, presumptuous, and ungrounded words, St James has especially now to do. Whatever is wanting in works, these words must supply, taking their place; instead of walking in obedience they have their so-called knowledge, instead of life they have doctrine, instead of the reality the appearance. The less disposed a man is to be taught, the more forward he is to teach others; the slower his heart is to hear the word of truth, the swifter does his tongue run away with its sayings. Hence, it may be observed that St James has given us specifically, in ch. i. 19, the proper theme of his Epistle, which he then proceeds to expound. Slow to speak!—this has been from the beginning of ch. iii. his text. Similarly, as he had added at the

first—And slow to wrath!—and, as he had hinted at this in the condemned cursing which comes from the same mouth as the blessing, he now proceeds more directly to speak of it, and denounces envying and strife, wars and fightings, evil speaking and judging. This extends to ch. iv. 12, when he again returns more generally to the "proud boasting;" and, finally, to the opposite *patience*, with which the Epistle set out; to the power of prayer for our own and our brethren's cure, and for the conversion of sinners in true wisdom.

There is but one faith, that which is genuine and sound; yet St James called the unsound faith by the same name, in order to exhibit it in all its self-contradiction. There is but one wisdom, that which is true; yet he admits that, independent of and in opposition to it, there is much so-called wisdom to be found. He now places the two in contrast: and, at the outset, before in ver. 17 he perfectly delineates true wisdom, he suggests one great note of distinction between them, which is obvious to all, and itself decisive:—he places in opposition to each other, *the meekness of true wisdom and the contention of the false.*

By this he has, to use the common saying, at once hit the nail on the head; and can cry to the whole community with power—Who is a wise man and prudent among you? Let him show in a good conversation his works, in the meekness of wisdom! He is not now speaking primarily of *that* wisdom which is most essentially necessary to every man, the want of which first becomes known to ourselves in the time of trial, and drives us to prayer—that wisdom, to wit, which is patience, obedience, and the discreet use of God's tests and discipline. But he means, as just before, wisdom for the teaching of others, which was to be *shown* or approved among the brethren. And that wisdom must thus be shown; for if God has given us such a gift, He gave it to us not for ourselves alone, but for the service and salvation of others also. Only a perversion of this truth lies at the foundation of the delusion and error which makes a man imagine that he is wise, and therefore ready to show his wisdom to others. *Who* is wise and prudent among you? Answer enough comes from all hands—Such we all are! But not every man who cries—I also! can accept the test of the second part of the sentence. When St James's question is uttered into the midst of the Church, how soon the wise men

and those endued with knowledge announce themselves; how few are disposed modestly to say—That am I not as yet, but must first learn to become wise! Even among the women the ready response is too frequently heard; how many of them are there who can scarcely keep silence in the church; who do not merely ask their husbands at home, but answer them too without being themselves asked, and not only their husbands at home! (1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35.)

But observe well the question of St James, ye presumptuous! Who is *wise* and *endued with knowledge?* There is a great difference between these two; and the second is not of much value unless preceded by the former. Not only may a man be *knowing* for evil with the worst of all folly; there is also a good knowledge or intelligence, a skill in the performance of individual acts, which is then only real and useful when it proceeds from wisdom, and continues in concert with wisdom. To be *merely* knowing or intelligent, is not much of itself, it is a very ambiguous, dubious, and questionable thing; but to be *wise* and full of knowledge, that is the great concern! Now, who *is* wise and endued with knowledge? Who is there that has it in reality, that good thing, and not merely says that he has it? This is the meaning of the question, which asks for the thing itself amid all the semblances and pretensions thereto. First be, become, wise; do not begin at once with the assertion and assumption of being so! Would you know what is the best test of truth, which is sure to detect and baffle all forwardness and error? Show forth, before all things, in your good *conversation* your *works*. This we heard in the second chapter; it is always decisive; and it is so even here, where the teaching of others is concerned. Proud words, which are not sustained by any witness of the life, are clouds without water (Jude 12), mere noisy thunder without the glance and might of the lightning. It is the walk which distinguishes those whose conversation is in heaven, and who are guided by the same rule, from those who are the enemies of the cross of Christ, about which they may very often talk (Phil. iii. 16, 18, 20). In the life, by the works, the light of the Father shines reflected from His children (Matt. v. 16); the true teacher tells us—Be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so! (Phil. iii. 17). St Peter exhorts Christians to have their conversation honest

among the Gentiles, that they might see and glorify their good works (1 Pet. ii. 12); and, moreover, he speaks of the mighty power of a silent conversation without word, which he commends to godly women, "that if any obey not the word, they may also without the word be won by the conversation of the wives!" (1 Pet. iii. 1). Where the good foundation has before been laid, the very words become power and life; they themselves are then *works:* it is this which St James probably means, reckoning among the works the genuine acts of a useful and successful word and testimony. For then there is in the words life and spirit, the emphasis of power and truth. But what kind of spirit is this, in the walk, the work, and the word of Christians? That which teaches and warns—Let us not be desirous of vainglory in teaching, provoking one another, envying one another! That which exhorts—Restore the erring brother in the spirit of *meekness* (Gal. v. 26, vi. 1). Thus *meekness* is the element and the token of all true wisdom from above. It is that internal meekness and submission of heart with which a man first submits himself to learn of God, receiving the word which saves his own soul (Jas. i. 21). *This* meekness, then, *shows* itself outwardly in the whole deportment, especially where *speaking* and teaching are concerned. Not as if this wisdom was devoid of earnestness and zeal, of the sacred wrath of love which worketh the righteousness of God, of keenness in bearing testimony to the truth; but even in its zeal its love is approved in the conscience of him who hears, and even in its anger true meekness, which doeth neither too much nor too little, is never disturbed. More upon this point we reserve for St James' description of the wisdom which is peaceable, gentle, teachable, merciful, and impartial. Let us now only hear his question—Have you this wisdom? Do *you show* this meekness of genuine wisdom, as it dwells in the heart, in your life and works? *Are* you, then, thus truly wise, who glory in being so?

But if ye have (instead of this) bitter envy and contention in your heart—glory *not*, and lie not against the truth! The word which is here translated *envy* is properly *zeal;* and because there is a good and sweet zeal of love which flows from the fountain of grace in the heart, St James adds the qualification *bitter* zeal, meaning that which is ambitious, hateful, and envious;

afterwards in ver. 16 he takes the word alone in its evil sense. When the world terms the holy zeal of God's children *contention, it* lies against the truth; knowing well that this war is carried on only for the sake of peace. We all know, if we will know, how to distinguish in ourselves and others the sweetness and the bitterness of love and of hatred, of humility and of pride, the spirit of peace and the spirit of contention. Where, however, *contention* really exists, there can be no true zeal; and whence cometh or floweth this contention, fighting, and war, but from our own *heart?*

Have you this in your heart? It may be hoped that we shall all answer more humbly—Alas, blessed Apostle, we have too much of it still! It may be hoped that no man will be too ready to boast in the lie—My heart is already altogether sweetened by the love of God; I am not conscious of any remains of contention, envy, or wrath! But this is the impure superfluity of naughtiness which we are diligently rooting out, if we have received with meekness the word of eternal wisdom for ourselves; according to the exhortation, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice" (Eph. iv. 31). We at least suffer not the bitterness which may still remain in our hearts any longer to flow forth from the hole of the fountain, the mouth; we *have*, that is, we retain and keep, it no longer in our heart. Is it so with us, dear brethren? Alas, how do the children of the world everywhere contend with each other! And naturally so, for what else have they in their hearts? But, alas, how unnatural it is that Christians, the disciples of a meek and lowly Master, should do the same! They contend among themselves, they contend and quarrel with the world; yea, the whole Christianity of many a devotee consists only, we may say, in a bitter contempt of the sins of sinners, in a proud and loveless contention with that which it terms the wicked world. Is there any of this in your hearts, and you let it have free course, then—St James says—*Glory not* in being wise, for that would be only a *lying* against the truth. His word goes still further: Even if it is *for* the truth that you bitterly contend, nevertheless, without the meekness of wisdom, your testimony for the truth which you intelligently hold is only a *lie*, and in the evil spirit which prompts you will rather damage the truth than further its obe-

dience. For your mind, and walk, and deportment, *your work in word*, contradicts the substance of the word you preach: you contend while you insist upon love, you act the hypocrite even while teaching the truth—and can that do otherwise than create offence and harm?

But those whom it concerns will not hear it; they go on to glory and justify themselves: "Should we not speak since we know the truth? Should we not be zealous, when righteousness is our aim? Should we not let the light of our wisdom shine, since we have received it from God to that end?" St James answers such a man, patiently and with a holy zeal—"*No, ye lie!* Your *contentious* wisdom ye have *not* received from God! That is not the wisdom which cometh from above, but—*earthly, human, devilish!* Every good gift, all genuine wisdom, is from *above*. But that which, lying against the truth, is declared to be such, is false wisdom: not from heaven, but earthly; not from God's Spirit, but human, of man's soul, and flesh, and blood; not of Christ, the King of the kingdom of God, the destroyer of the works of the devil, but itself devilish, springing from the influence and seduction of evil spirits." We might, upon this deep saying of St James, write a history of all science falsely so called, of all worldly wisdom, of much so-called philosophy and even theology; but we must adhere to the obvious practical meaning of the words, in their order in the exhortation. Earthly, human, devilish: on the one hand, these are all combined in false, contentious wisdom, as, according to the Catechism, the devil, the world, and our flesh, mislead us first of all in the misbelief of groundless imagination; on the other hand, there is a gloomy progression downwards in these several stages. The first so-called wisdom is the *earthly*, the being endued with knowledge concerning earth and for earth; and this might in itself avail as knowledge, if it did not assume to place itself in the stead of wisdom. This is the economical-political, commercial, industrial skill, the supreme and the only skill of the earthly-minded, the fisherman-skill to throw the net without the word of God: to this belongs the progress of arts and inventions in our age, which might be left in its place and honour, if men did not forget heaven while reducing earth to their service. But *man* keeps it not in its place, when he resists the Spirit of God: his earthly cunning becomes, as human, a cunning of selfishness,

like that of the unjust steward, a cunning of wicked lust and vainglory, so that his belly becomes his god, and his glory is sought in what is his shame. When the earthly is exalted against heaven, and further earthly wisdom is applied to the heavenly word of truth, then arises more and more what St James calls *human* wisdom, properly *natural-human* (*sensual*, or, quite literally, *sensuous*, *psychical*), for it is the same word which St Paul uses in 1 Cor. ii. 14. They who lay hold of and treat the word of God as an earthly thing, pervert it in their *school-contentions*, and think at best that godliness is also gain or a *craft* (1 Tim. vi. 4). O how great, and ever-increasing, is the folly when flesh and blood invades that which belongs to the Spirit of God! All that most becoming distrust of our own spirit is gone, and all humble disposition to be taught of God. Thence comes the contention of the learned in their proud science, thence all false theology, as well the orthodox as the heretical. But it does not end there; for *Satan* soon comes in, when flesh and blood would reveal instead of the Father in heaven through His Son and Spirit. "Reason goeth as *she* will (alas, not even as *she* will, that is the delusion)—Satan can turn her any way!" and he *will* do so; he does it despotically, according to his mind, through the ministry of his spirits filling the air of this world. To human delusion is then added sin and perversion, which is puffed up by an influence and inbreathing altogether from below. If you handle, and study, and teach God's word only in a human manner, another spirit will soon intermeddle with yours in the matter; and the lie against the truth will soon break forth in the vilest contention, the most impure zeal, the impetuous storming and driving of those whom the devil drives. If Satan can glide in even where, as in the case of Peter, Matt. xvi. 23, the human element is mingled with and defiles well-meaning love—how will the busy devils blow up the already existing hell in the heart into the fire of the tongue, when pride and hatred handle the rudder! That is the *contention*, which St James means, in its full and perfect form; the lying contention about the truth of God, the ambitious strife under the cloak of zeal for the Divine honour, which divides brethren, overturns houses, and lays waste the church of God.

By their *fruits* ye may know them, adds St James: for

where envy and contention are, there is *confusion and every vain thing!* Peaceable wisdom does not there sow good seed of righteousness; for only where there is mercy, are also good fruits (vers. 17, 18). St James does not regard these evil works as worthy of the name of *fruits* at all. Let all history, on the great and on the small scale, from the beginning till now, say whether it is not as here described. "And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house!" (Luke x. 5). Thus did our Lord send forth His messengers; and thus they proclaimed the peace of the Gospel (Acts x. 36; Eph. ii. 17). But those whom He did not send troubled the Church with doctrine, and subverted the souls of the believers (Acts xv. 24); unruly and vain talkers they were who subverted whole houses (Titus i. 10, 11). And when through such vain babbling and contention the house of God, the entire Church, was misled and subverted, the Reformers, in the spirit of peace and in holy zeal of warfare, began to build again. But, alas, even then some unholy contention crept in, and the evil fruit of the fleshly seed is still present, especially in the divisions of evangelical churches; and now this evil work still too much mingles with our common warfare against the only true enemy. O that the wisdom from above might teach us to edify one another in peace, as in the beginning the Church gathered from Jews and Gentiles did, with all their differences and oppositions! All the distress and perplexity of the Church, all the *confusion* and unsubjection or *rebellion* of self against the Spirit of God, has sprung from the contention of the fleshly nature: hence the divisions and sects; hence much other evil work, especially the hypocrisy which lurks beneath an enforced unity. In the world, and in earthly things, many a house and many a state bears testimony that in confusion and envying nothing good can thrive, but all mischief must ensue. But still more mournful and desolating is strife about His word in the house and commonwealth of God, the carnal contention among brethren and the members of Christ.

Brethren, *contend not in the way!* (Gen. xlv. 24). Have you not stood together before your Joseph, to receive forgiveness? You are altogether sinners, but by common grace are now brethren as being children of peace. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing

one another and forgiving one another; let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; *thus and not otherwise* let the word of Christ dwell among you richly in all wisdom, thus and not otherwise teach and admonish yourselves and one another (Col. iii. 12–16). *This* is the wisdom from above, in which your meekness will show itself and accomplish its work; that brings unity, peace, love, order in obedience of the truth, and every *good* work. "Live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. xiii. 11).

XXI.

THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE.

(Ch. iii. 17, 18.)

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. But the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

Contend not in self-will, hatred, and envious pride of vainglory, but approve your wisdom in *meekness!* Mark that from strife only evil work can grow, instead of the peaceable fruit of righteousness! This would be enough, if these false teachers would thus easily be entreated, and if these contentions might so easily be quelled. But St James knew better, and therefore he does not cease so soon his testimony against false wisdom—just as in the former chapter against false faith. Many who were really guilty might not give in to all his previous words, but persist to say—I envy not, nor contend; my zeal is only for truth; my wisdom is *not* earthly, human, devilish, as thou sayest, but that which comes from above! Therefore St James at last places a clear and lustrous and not to be evaded mirror before the vainly wise, the proudly self-asserting and fleshly zealots, in which they must see their own condemnation, if they look into it and continue to look. Let us earnestly look into it ourselves, that we may perfectly know the difference between true and false wisdom, that we may see what manner of men we are, and what of evil we have yet to put away.

The wisdom from above is of this character: that is, he is such who has received, retained, and matured that wisdom. Here is a clear and beautiful picture, perfectly sketched in few but decisive strokes! Who among you is *such* a wise man, and can humbly recognise himself in this portrait? Most of us, alas, are very far from having reached its completeness; but let him who sorrowfully feels this of himself, look around for living examples in whom these traits are found united, that they may bring the picture more livingly near, and this will help to make the word, in itself dead, a living word.

True wisdom is *from above;* this must be understood at the outset: it cannot be learned of men in human fashion, it cannot be explored and attained by our own spirit, it cannot be speculated out by our own will,—it must be *given* as a good gift from above. But it is given only to those who *ask*, and to those only who ask aright, who ask in obedience to the will of God for an understanding heart, not merely to know but to do His holy will; to those whose hearts condemn them not in their prayers, but who have confidence towards God, for they keep His commandments and do that which is well-pleasing in His sight, especially that great commandment that we love one another (1 John iii. 21–23). But the gift of God, which is thus prayed for, is only given *into the heart;* and it is then the good treasure of the good man, instructed unto the kingdom of heaven (Matt. xii. 35, xiii. 52). Thus the wisdom *from above* is at the same time always only a wisdom *from within:* it is not matter of the head and provision of knowledge, but matter of the heart and the real possession of the inner man and being. Ye *have in your heart* bitter envy and wrath—had been St James' rebuke. Have ye in your heart truth and purity from God, love and peace as the gracious gift of the new birth? This is his question now, when he applies the profoundest test. Is your love really rich in knowledge and all *experience?* (Phil. i. 9). Are ye actually teachers and masters of full age, who by reason of *use* in spiritual life have the senses of your new nature exercised to distinguish good and evil? (Heb. v. 14). Thus deeply he penetrates through all semblance and delusion into the inmost being; *first* disclosing the ground of the heart, and *not till then* exhibiting the outward expression of that inward wisdom.

First of all, and before anything else can be said, the wisdom which is given from above to the inner man is *pure;* that is, he who has it has it first as purity of heart, is pure and clean in his inmost spirit. We think naturally here, not merely of that purity, in the common sense of it, which is opposed to fleshly lust, but of that which the Holy Scripture everywhere implies in this deep and beautiful word. All sin is impure desire and adultery; true spiritual purity is the being cleansed from that stain. If the wisdom, in which I am to teach others, is right and genuine, that is, unsinful and pure, it must come from a heart which is cleansed and purified in the love of God; for only into such a heart can it enter as a heavenly gift; "into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter, nor dwell in the body which is subject unto sin" (Wisd. i. 4). They who approve themselves servants of God, must first approve themselves in purity, and by that in knowledge (2 Cor. vi. 6). The wise like serpents contend with the world and the devil, but they are without guile like doves (Matt. x. 16). But, as in the lower and physical sense no man is pure by nature, but must continually mortify the lusts which still exist in his flesh, not otherwise is it with spiritual purity in love to God. Therefore it is not only to open sinners, to those who have lapsed into adultery, that St James cries in the next chapter—Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, if ye would bear the vessels of your Lord; and purify your hearts, that your hands may be clean, ye double-hearted and unfaithful! (ch. iv. 8). But it is the continual task of all the regenerate, who through Christ believe in God—Purify your souls in obedience to the truth through the Spirit! (1 Pet. i. 21, 22). This is the fundamental condition of all wisdom, if it is to remain in the heart as God's gift, and flow purely from it: —the continual self-denial and self-conquest through which alone we impure sinners can be, by continually *becoming*, pure. Always *first* our own obedience, and that the obedience of the heart to the truth, which we know and acknowledge—before we should undertake to speak thereof, and show our wisdom! Always *first* must we be sincere and pure in God's presence, before we can say anything in the name of God in presence of our neighbour! Always *first* the question—How do I myself stand towards the truth? Does my heart live in it, is my will submissive to it? *That*, indeed, I cannot show to any man, and

no man can look within me; but God above sees all, and so looks for this pure internal sincerity. Therefore must we utter always the prayer—Prove me, and show me my thoughts; make me pure from every secret delusion of desire and vanity!

If wisdom is sound in this *first* point, it may afterwards show itself as it really is, internally. St James paints it in *seven* traits; but the first three still refer to those demonstrations which properly flow from the inner man, which are strictly connected with the sound condition of the pure heart. The wisdom which is pure is then also *peaceable, gentle, teachable;* not contentious, hard, or proudly self-asserting.

That which Christ in the Sermon on the Mount placed seventh in order, pronouncing the *peacemakers* blessed, is here rightly put first. There the saying concerning *purity of heart* preceded, and so it does here; for only out of the internal peace of a pure heart, sincerely purifying itself continually, comes the true peaceableness of word, work, and walk. The peaceable children of God, against whom the ungodly, who break His covenant, put forth their hands (Ps. lv. 20)—are primarily those who are reconciled to and accepted of God in this same covenant. Another word, also in the Old Testament, terms them beautifully—in an expression which the New Testament brings into its full force—*the quiet in the land*, against whom their haters without cause speak not peace, but evermore devise deceitful matters (Ps. xxxv. 19, 20). But these are not they who falsely cry, Peace, when there is no peace; how should their wisdom then come from above, and how could their hearts be then pure in the obedience of the truth? Indeed, they seek, and desire, and labour for the *righteousness* of God; therefore, according to the Sermon on the Mount, these peaceable ones are persecuted for righteousness' sake. But still it is not *they* who are haters and persecutors with restless spirits; as far as in them lies, they maintain peace with all men, labourers in the work of patience and faith, who everywhere proffer the peace of God; in the slow and thorough husbandry of God, *sowing* righteousness, that love and peace may be the harvest. That this alone is the right method, they are taught by their own most internal experience: this is what they are taught by the Spirit of peace in the New Testament, which is a different spirit from that of Elias—or that of Jehu, the son of Nimshi (2 Kings

ix. 20). O how beautiful are everywhere, where they come, the feet of such a messenger of peace, anointed and sent of the Lord! He speaks and testifies the truth; but in humility, from a heart which has daily to seek forgiveness for its own sins; he contends against the unrighteousness of the world, but as being equipped and prepared to that end with the gospel of peace (Eph. vi. 15).

Therefore it is further *gentle*:—this seems to be almost the same, but means rather the *manifestation* of peaceableness in deportment towards others. This is particularly that *meekness* of wisdom, in which St James previously summed up all. The minister of God approves himself with his true *knowledge*, which comes from *pureness*, continually in *longsuffering*, in *kindness*, in the *Holy Ghost* (2 Cor. vi. 6). Not therefore by his own spirit, which is stirred by vehement passion after the mind of the flesh. Because we know the terror of the Lord, we deal tenderly with the people—says the same Apostle (2 Cor. v. 11). The gentle servant of God is far from rebuking only with severity, far from demanding, driving, and constraining; he knows how in the long forbearance of God to bear with the wicked, and all their wickedness (2 Tim. ii. 24), because he expects nothing else from their nature; he can also instruct those who oppose themselves in meekness (ver. 25); specially he can be wisely and unsinfully compliant with the weak, that he may not destroy what he should save. (We may translate the word in St James also by *compliant*.) Thus he makes his *gentleness* known to all men, because the Lord, who came to save men's souls, always is near in the holy patience of pure love (Phil. iv. 5; Luke ix. 56). And to this we are all exhorted, dear brethren, in the words which bid us speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness to all men; *for we ourselves also were sometimes* foolish, disobedient, deceived, hateful—but the kindness and benevolence of God our Saviour alone hath saved and won us (Titus iii. 2–4). How can one who has himself been saved and forgiven be hard and severe, remembering that fact, against his fellow-sinners and fellow-redeemed? "Is it not grace which makes the difference in me? And is not the same grace also for others? And have I myself no longer any sin?" To think thus in true wisdom makes the Christian gentle in his demands, judgments,

and deportment. He demands nothing for himself, makes no personal pretensions at all; he demands his neighbour's soul only for God, as the messenger and minister of His all-winning love. He does not judge and condemn swiftly and rigorously: he does not indeed compromise with sin in false gentleness, but he takes good care not to lay too much stress upon any circumstances, and not to think only evil of his neighbour. He deals with the sinner in tender prudence, that he may reach his heart; he well knows that the quiet might and gentle violence of love is the strongest and most penetrating of all power. He never forgets the word of his Master—*See well, how* thou pluckest the mote out of thy brother's eye! (Matt. vii. 5). If that holds good of the brother's mote, with how much more prudence and care is the whole world's unrighteousness to be dealt with!

And if, after all, I myself still have my motes, so that my eye has not seen right, and my hand sometimes missed the mark! The wisdom from above *is easily entreated*—and that must never be wanting! Only the perfect wisdom above, the wisdom of God, can speak without having itself to hear and to learn; but the wisdom which is given from above to a sinful man is perfect only in having learned and in continuing to learn. God, speaking to Job out of the whirlwind, shames him by saying, "I will demand of thee, make me to know;" but Elihu in his wisdom cries, "*If thou* hast anything to say, answer me; speak, for I desire to justify thee" (Job xxxiii. 32). St James' word means also *teachable* or *willing to hear*. Woe unto those who find it a contradiction, that their *wisdom* should ever *need to be taught!* We were sometimes foolish: to know and acknowledge this, was the beginning of our wisdom, and thus we received God's grace. For, "seest thou a man who is wise in his own eyes, there is more hope of a fool than of him" (Prov. xxvi. 12). St James has spoken much on this point at an earlier stage, but he still holds to it here: wisdom with us consists not merely in our *having once* submitted to hear, but in our continuing and increasing in our swiftness to hear. The only teachers coming down from heaven are the disciples who strive constantly to be perfect like their only Master. The learned have a Latin proverb, which however they do not always verify in themselves, that *in teaching we learn*. This is the

motto of divine wisdom in heavenly things; in them there is no such thing as ever speaking and teaching without having anything to learn. In our German words *Bescheidenheit* and *Bescheid wissen*, modesty and knowledge are closely allied; out of profound knowledge comes always deepening humility and prudence. He who is exercised in the wisdom which cometh from above has never ended with it; he can never be self-asserting and obstinate; he receives the common commendation of one who may be spoken to and answered when he speaks. And this becomes us fallible men; in this spirit alone we can go forward in the right way; for "he that hateth to be instructed is already (again) in the way of sinners" (Ecclus. xxi. 6). Let us choose to ourselves this judgment, *to know among ourselves* what is good (Job xxxiv. 4). If thou hast an excuse when I condemn thee—how gladly will I admit it if it be valid! (*I desire thy justification*—said Elihu to Job.) Hast thou anything to object against my words—let me hear it, that I may not do wrong when I mean to do right! Such a wise man does not go forth among the people, to thrust a sword into their belly, as Ehud did to the king of the Moabites, with—"I have a word from God for thee!" (Judges iii. 20). To him the sincere question is much more natural—"Hast thou a word from God for me?" The first Apostle, Peter, received rebuke, when he was in the wrong, from Paul the latest comer (Gal. ii. 11). Moses, the man of God, received instruction from his father-in-law Jethro: "The thing that thou doest is not good; hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee" (Ex. xviii. 17–22). But why need we seek examples among the servants? The Master Himself puts us to shame by condescending to the very limits of the apparent possibility that He—who was born (not *born again*) to bear testimony to the truth, and who came into the world as the personal Truth—might have been in error; condescending thus, however, only that He might set before us the highest of all examples. See and mark how He, before the high priest, referred to all that He had said and done; but, when the common servant smote Him on the face, His answer was—If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? (John xviii. 20–23). Verily, every servant who remembers the word of the Master, "*If I have spoken*

evil, bear witness of it!" will be always ready to receive from every man any evidence of error that he can bring—knowing full well that it is not for him absolutely to say, I have only spoken right!

And *now first*, after St James has set before us the spirit of wisdom from above, as *peaceable*, *gentle*, and *teachable*, he speaks further *of its work*, whence its good fruits come and to what they tend. His last four words, which express this, are connected in pairs: to retain the connection between the *principle* and the *expression*, the cause and the work; and to bring back all at the last to the first and most internal principle of wisdom.

Full of mercy and good fruits! These are united, because *to show* mercy towards our fellow is itself the good fruit, in which all good fruits are comprised; to *have* mercy for him *in the heart*, is at the same time the power or the seed of such outward charity. Indeed, to *create fruit* is the end of all true wisdom, which can never be a dead and unfruitful knowledge. The knowledge of the *will* of God is given to us, in all kinds of wisdom and spiritual understanding, in order that we may walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, and be fruitful in all good works (Col. i. 9, 10). But every good work, as fruit in ourselves, produces also, will at least also produce, good fruit in our neighbour. Here the Lord's High-priestly word passes over to His people, the priestly ministers and mediators of His love, so that every one of us in His strength may say—I sanctify myself for them, that they may also be sanctified in the truth (John xvii. 19). The good fruit of the seed of grace is, at once and inseparably, our own sanctification in effectual love, and the influence of that love upon others: in this style alone the New Testament always speaks of *good fruits*. But they are *good* fruits, which never grow but on the stock of love! Many have done great works, which the Lord will not accept as the fruits of the good tree. Many in our days are very laborious, and run hither and thither, "in the cause of the kingdom of God," as they say—but the kingdom of God is not built up in their manner, and what they may seem to effect will not be put to *their* reckoning. Many are deeply engaged in teaching the people opinions, which are to them their truths, and in disputing away their errors—but where is the good fruit of all this stir? who is mended by it, who is converted or won to the king-

dom of heaven? On the other hand, there are many of the quiet in the land, who make no noise, who profess no great things, who walk everywhere humbly and meekly—but wherever they go they diffuse around them what seems a breath of life; the words which they speak in season are seeds of corn; all their work and life is fruitful in silent influence, and great is the fruit which they bring to God, though man knows nothing of it and thinks the reverse. Grace works by such souls; they live in love, and that is the profound secret of their strength. Such examples show us the meaning of the apostolical word, in opposition to the seeming labour of the vehement zealots who do not work the mercy of God; although those who are called and fitted to that purpose should lift up their loud and mighty testimony, and vehemently contend for good,—under the obligation, however, of asking themselves very solemnly the question, Is my wisdom full of mercy and good fruits?

The keenest question, finally, remains, and that which is most pervasive, though it only tests the fundamental principle—Is it *without partiality, and without hypocrisy?* Both go together, here as before; for what hypocrisy is without partiality, and what partiality does not spring from an essential hypocrisy? St James does not mean to say that we should be what the world, which perverts every word and idea that concerns God's truth, calls "unprejudiced" or impartial; for in the next chapter (ver. 4) he makes the sharp demarcation between the world and friendship with God. The folly of the world may count our chaste and decided devotion to God, and fellowship with His children *in opposition* to other men, to be *partisanship:* we shall best counteract the perversion and protest of this word by that divine *impartiality* which the Apostle means. Alas, this is not often to be found; alas, this last mark detects much false wisdom with its hypocrisy! There have been periods in the history of the Christian Church when almost all might have been asked—Brethren, are ye truly impartial, unprejudiced? Are ye so impartial in that universal love which remembers that the grace of Christ is free and open to all mankind? How easily do we make evil distinctions, which can never consist with the pure and unfeigned faith in the Lord of glory! The wisdom which is truly *unprejudiced*, which does not look through any discolouring medium, and is not distracted by any ima-

gination or prejudgment which thwarts the pure love of God, beholds all men in the light of truth; therefore it admits the excellence of nothing which does not stand the test of this light, it regards not the person or the dignity of any man. But, on the other side (and here we mostly fail!), it overlooks, judges, and neglects no man, be he who he may, but accepts joyfully all goodness according to its worth, be it found in whom it may. This wisdom is so wise that it looks through every appearance and form to the inner being as it stands before God; or, failing to do that, refrains at least on that account from all judgment and distinction. Only then is it without *hypocrisy*, that is, genuine, pure wisdom, as given from above, and there is mingled with it no self-created skill in making distinctions. Thus St James in the last word, as the sum of all, leads his whole discourse back to the first; for, according to the purity of the heart at the first, will be the absence of hypocrisy in the expressions of wisdom. But here we must ask in humility—Where is such wisdom from above perfected in any sinful men? We must confess that the best men have too much failed in this respect, and that there is among Christians generally too much of the party and prejudiced spirit. Therefore, St James places last, as the highest goal, from which also we must continually set out, the making the heart pure that the eyes may be clear to see, and the hands pure to act; for *hypocrisy* is rooted deeply in us all, until we are sanctified through and through by the truth unto the wisdom which faileth not.

St James, however, would not by this conclusion cast us down, instead of stimulating us; he therefore, according to the meekness of his own wisdom, descends from this elevation, and utters another word which again requires only meekness and peaceableness as the condition of the healthy influence of our wisdom. *That* at least we can, and we ought, all soon to attain to; suppressing all the contention and strife which may result from the partiality of our evil thoughts, we may *in peace* speak the word of God's truth, and carry on the work of wisdom. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace *of* those and *for* those who keep, and practise, and work peace, seeking that and that alone! Thus St James sets a gracious promise over against that which he had said about the evil works of contention; but we have already, on that verse, said enough upon it to render

any further remarks upon it here unnecessary. To be filled with the *fruits of righteousness* which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God (Phil. i. 11)—is the end of all good works which God has begun *in ourselves* and will perform. *Peaceable fruit of righteousness*—that is what God's holy discipline, which accompanies the word, will bring forth in us (Heb. xii. 11). And the same should be the only end of all our teaching, the fruit of all our endeavours among our neighbours for our good. "*Fruits*, gentlemen, fruits, in the soundness of men!" This was the king of Prussia's word to the University of Königsberg; and it was a royal word, a word of Solomon in this age. Health-giving, and healthy fruits grow where good *seed* is sown; but the seed itself has been gathered as the produce of good seed, and thus one righteousness is sown for another. Let us ourselves be full ears which bow down to scatter around their grains of seed! And what is the element of blessing and prosperity, the good weather from above which makes the seed grow? *In peace*, says the Apostle—including, indeed, the storm and boisterous weather of *good* contention, as well as the earnest labour of the plough before it can become seed; but still it holds good that the peace of God is never wanting, that only *those* really attain to righteousness in themselves and others, who seek, and find, and maintain this peace. For, in its deepest principle, peace and righteousness are one and the same.

XXII.

WHENCE COME WARS AND FIGHTINGS AMONG YOU?

(Ch. iv. 1–3.)

From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye fight and war, but ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

Long since did He appear, whose last name was *Prince of peace*, because of the increase of His government and peace there should be no end, when He should order His kingdom and

establish it with judgment and with justice (Is. ix. 6, 7). Long ago did the Holy Spirit descend, who testifies and works as a Spirit of *peace*, as He is called. And yet that heavenly song—*On earth peace!* is so little fulfilled, that not even in the Church is peace to be found; so that Ps. lxxii., concerning the kingdom of Solomon, when the mountains should bring peace, and the little hills righteousness, when the righteous should flourish, and there should be abundance of peace—is still no more than a *prophecy*. From the beginning, even in apostolical churches, there was not that perfect peace; and in our day St James' word penetrates with conviction every community—*Whence comes warfare and contention among you?*

That the Gentiles, before Christ came to speak peace unto them, and to cut off the battle-bow (Zech. ix. 10), should have lived in war and contention, was no more than natural: but Christendom, avowing the name of Christ, should surely be at peace. Indeed, this so-called Christendom on earth, as it (not contrary to God's counsel) is a wide net which encloses many peoples, is far from being the Church of the saints, the body of Christ, in which His Spirit *dwelleth:* therefore to this day bloody wars are carried on among Christian nations, and it cannot be otherwise in the cause of righteousness against unrighteousness; to prosecute boldly such wars is the Christian duty of kings and subjects, on all such occasions as demand the sword, which God puts into their hands. Further, among Christian peoples, states, and churches, the good fight of faith must be urged with the sword of the word against all that is unchristian and godless; as every pious man must, for his peace, war against the devil, the world, and his own flesh. But this good warfare St James does not mean; he rather includes in the *peace*, in which the fruit of *righteousness* must be sown (ch. iii. 18), the pure zeal of truth in love against all unrighteousness, and all the words and works which this involves. Nevertheless, enough is left to warrant his keen question: Whence come *wars and contentions* among you, strife and dissension in word and work between brethren and members of the Lord's Church, *evil* wars in miniature like those which are carried on among the nations without?

That among the Christians only in name who are essentially heathens, that among the children of the world, among whom

there has been no advent and entrance of the gentle Prince of peace, houses and hearts should be full of war and confusion—is also quite natural. But is it found also among *you*, ye believers, who have been born again through the word of truth? If those are called the *sons of peace*, who are only ready and prepared to receive the message, Peace be to this house! (Luke x. 5, 6), how should they approve themselves the peaceable children of God, who have long received it! But is it so, that believers themselves can repel the question of St James, and reply in general—With us is everywhere peace!?—O no; it presupposes another question, the answer of which is self-understood and obvious:—*Is there not actually* war and contention in many houses in which Christians dwell together? in many unions, and in many families, even of believers? between neighbours and companions in the spiritual house of God? Is there not among brethren that worst and most hateful contention about the word of truth and peace itself, carried on in anything but the peace of love? This is what St James means especially at first, although not alone, when he here *extends* his word, in order to speak generally of the evil principle which lies at the root of all evil contention. Thus, *whence cometh that?* Truly a great and salutary question. He does not put it as not himself knowing, but he would receive the sincere answer from ourselves. Are we ready to give it of ourselves, before he utters it in condemnation? Too many of us are inclined to evade it, and find other reasons than the right. The most common reply refers the fault to our neighbour, or to something without: every contentious man is ready to say of his fellow-contenders—They will not have peace, and therefore I cannot. There are, indeed, cases in which no man can be bold enough to single out individual persons as the cause; in which the *whence* cannot be properly found among the disputants themselves;—but every one will hold to it, that he is not the cause, and in the end some unknown *no man* bears the blame. Brethren, that is the well-known *some one*, whom St James afterwards (ver. 7) can mention, *the devil;* but he fleeth if he is resisted; he can sow hatred and enmity only where *hearts* admit and foster the seed. Can the smoke of the conflict without come from *anywhere else* than the fire within; from that tinder in your souls which is ready within you for Satan's spark? The true answer would be the

humble confession—The lust of self, the mother of all sin is, alas, still mighty within us; we do not pray for the grace and gift from above to resist it, for God's meek and peaceable wisdom; our supplicating and praying, such as we use, is, at least, not the right prayer. This is the answer which the Apostle gives in the first three verses of this chapter: he shows us the still present ground of all disquiet within us; points out the neglected way to peace; and, finally, gives the conclusive answer to all false excuses of those who think they take this way.

Cometh it not thence, from your lusts which war in your members? Most assuredly; for where envy and contention, hatred and discord, are, there is confusion and every evil work; the contention or the discord is itself the evil thing which exalts itself against the order of God, and against his peace. Consequently, also, when this evil thing shows itself in the life, envy or hatred must be in the heart: whence could come the fruit, without the seed and root? Thus the fighting *among you* springs from one cause, which lies *in you.* Let no man say, as long as he partakes of this contentious spirit of strife—I am tempted and driven to it by the evil world, by false brethren, by contentious friends, and neighbours. Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his *own lust* and enticed. Look at the people of this evil world, who cannot keep peace among themselves: wherefore have the ungodly no peace? Because they are, each in himself, like the troubled sea which cannot be at rest, but casteth up on its waves the mire and dirt which is within it (Is. lvii. 20, 21). In the ground of the heart there is selfishness, which has learned nothing of the better and enduring inheritance (Heb. x. 34)—and therefore avarice, which is the cause of a great part of men's contention. Further, there is pride, which has not yet humbled itself before God; and thence ambition and despotism, which cannot be at peace, even when the Mine and Thine are not concerned. And there is evil self-love, which has in it absolutely nothing of the true love of the neighbour; and therefore hating, for no other reason than because bitter hatred dwells in the heart. These are the *lusts* which St James means, the impulses and tendencies of the flesh which for ever urge to the acquisition of this world's good, the enjoyment of sensual pleasure, the assertion of self-will; were these away, there would be no longer strife and contention. Is this evil

principle still in *you?* Many can through God's grace answer—Our own lust, with its manifold desires, is still present in our flesh, but we renounce and mortify it through the Spirit; therefore, while disquiet assaults us from without, we still strive to keep peace, as far as in us lies. Well for you, dear brethren! But there are others, and they are many more, who dare not in their consciences say this before God; and *those* St James refers to. Whatever kind of strife and contention may be among you, whatever form or relation it may assume (for there are disputes and enmities between individuals which scarcely break out in word, but instead thereof govern the whole life and conduct)—it is impossible that it can come from any other source than the lusts of your flesh. For where the Spirit dwelleth in us, *He* lusteth with the holy impulse of love against all hatred (ver. 5).

But the lusts war *in your members*, in the body of sins, in the dispositions and motives of his old life. This does not merely mean, as it may be first understood, that there they have their dwelling-place, or camp, or fortress, whence they issue and war *from the members*—for then St James would have so expressed himself. He will rather say, Ye are not at one in yourselves, ye have in your inner life, not peace, but war. What kind of war is that? First of all, even in *you*, in whom notwithstanding the Spirit dwelleth; so that the fleshly lusts war against the soul, fighting against your nobler part and true self (1 Pet. ii. 11), Ye have delight in the law of God, the royal law of love, after the inner man; but that other law in your members wars against the law of your mind, and bringeth you into captivity (Rom. vii. 22, 23). Or, if in the regenerate the soul is no longer in captivity to this law, yet it has not altogether lost its power; it conquers sometimes, and in some instances, the Spirit within you—and *hence* the evil! Finally, the many lusts and impulses fight *among themselves*, because they are many and varying: for example, pride and caprice may desire what avarice and self-interest may shun; the eye may aim at this, and the ear prefer that; so that ye are torn asunder within, exasperated by endless internal contradictions and disappointments. Examine yourselves, brethren, and detect what and how much of this is still *in you;* and begin afresh the *good warfare,* to *create peace within yourselves!* Do you not know what weapon to use? The *word of God* is put into our hands for

the external conflict; and for internal victory over self, the way of *prayer* is alone sufficient.

St James in the second word proposes to us this *true but neglected way of peace:* Ye covet, and *have* not; ye envy and desire to have, but cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye *have* not, *because ye ask not!* See here the striking picture of all false and vain hunting and running after peace, which only increases the disquiet; and after possession, which cannot be obtained so long as the only true way, which God's word points out, is passed by and neglected. One Apostle tells us to follow peace with all men! (Heb. xii. 14), and, in another place, to flee youthful lusts, but follow after righteousness, faith, love, peace! (2 Tim. ii. 22). Similarly, another quotes from the Old Testament: He that will love life, and see good days, let him eschew evil and do good; let him seek peace, and follow after it (1 Pet. iii. 11). But how different is this way from that restless and vehement pursuit of the objects of lust which, in all its external envyings, strifes, contentions, and wars, after all seeks only contentment within, but can never find it! ⌜The peace of the soul within itself is found only in God, and only from that can proceed peace with our neighbour: but this is a gift and grace from above, which therefore must be *attained in prayer.*⌟ Instead of that, ye seek it foolishly—thus St James addresses all who are concerned—out of yourselves, and independently of the true gift of God; ye think that this or that or something else may help you to attain contentment. In that consists the delusion of *lust*, which should beguile and hurry hither and thither only the blind world. Only therefore of that world St James' word holds good, in its fullest sense and most fearful truth. Ye are *full of desire* for much and many things, which ye would fain have because your lust promises itself therein pleasure and satisfaction; but with the desire alone ye *have* it not, ye only feel bitterly your not having. This is the first thing, and then another follows. ⌜Because others around you have that which your desire covets, your evil mind begins to *hate and envy;* for every selfish desire by its very nature is a spirit of envy against others.⌟ But with that ye cannot yet *obtain:* then ye begin to break faith in word and deed, ye *fight and war*, contend, go to law; ye pour contumely on your neighbour, as standing in your way; ye injure him in your displeasure, as if ye had to seek

from him what is wanting in yourselves; and all else that may be supposed to follow from this. But, after all, it is as it was at the first,—*Ye have not*! There comes in this way no contented and real having; for, even if ye gain the thing ye contend for, ye have obtained nothing by that, ye have not obtained the peace which ye sought in vain. In the possession ye become more and more assured that it was fallacious, that it could not bring peace; and then begins anew the unrestful, unsatisfied *desire*. Wherefore, then, *have* ye not with all your having, wherefore do ye not obtain with all your unwearied striving? [Because the essential matter is wanting, the *gift* from above, which alone is worthy to be called a *having* in peace. That comes into the heart only when it is prayed for, but *ye ask not;* that ye forget and neglect, although the word of God so graciously invites and attracts you. O thou unpeaceful, envious, and contentious world, be easily entreated, and learn where and in what thou art wanting! Learn to humble thyself in that confession which Daniel uttered for the unfaithful people of God—Yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand Thy truth (Dan. ix. 13).]

But if *ye*, who call yourselves believers, if ye who would be Christians, are condemned by St James' convincing preaching, through having diverged from the right way—how exceedingly evil is that! Hear, and suffer the word of admonition and instruction. Your fighting and warring also proceeds only from hatred and envy; and that again proceeds only from the perverted lusts and desires of the heart. And what is that way, which *ye* have long known? Ask for grace in order to the renunciation of all false desire, and ye shall have that best, internal peace, and be able then to keep peace also with all around. And for all that concerns the necessity of the bodily life, let your desire take the way of prayer to God. *Be careful for nothing*, but in everything let your requests be made known unto God (Phil. iv. 6). Contend and war about nothing; ask only; and ye shall receive.

But some of those who are thus rebuked and condemned repel the charge, being ready to fight boldly against the word of God—"But we pray, and yet do not receive!" St James gives them *finally, the true answer to all such self-justification*, that no man may escape him:—Ye ask and receive not, *because ye*

ask amiss. This is, at the same time, the most convincing and universal answer for all who complain that their prayer is vain and unanswered. Sure it is that he who asks receives; this word of God is firm as a rock, and can never fail. But we must pray aright, as God requires; not *amiss*, not so that God must refuse to admit that it is prayer. Much might here be said generally concerning the prayer that is heard; that it must be earnest and sincere between us and our God, that it must be humble and penitent as becometh sinners seeking grace, and that it must be confident on the ground of the Divine promise. But St James, while he lays down the general position, gives it a specific application.

In ch. i. 6, he had said—Let him that asketh ask *in faith* and doubt not; but now he turns to the other side of evil and improper praying, which cannot be of faith because it is not ordered according to the word and will of God. He points us to the *false design* of our supposed petition before God, that of which the Psalmist said—If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me (Ps lxvi. 18). He provokes us to examination of the ground of our heart—*for what* and *to what end* we have prayed, in our unanswered prayers. For what ought I to pray? For all that I really *lack* in body and soul—our heavenly Father will give His children all that they *have need of* (Matt. vi. 8)—but not for all that I *desire!* Take all thy desire in prayer to God—it had been said before. But now it is added—Then wilt thou see and know whether it be in God's presence lawful and pure desire, or sinful *lust.* Therefore most of those who desire pray not, because they already feel that they are repelled. But others, and these are worst of all, are so blinded, and have so perverted the piety which taught them once to pray, that they actually pray with their lusts and for their lusts. This thing and that, which they would fain have, must God give them; they are aggrieved if He gives it not; and become all the more envious and contentious, when their praying has been of no avail. How many prayers does God hear, to which the Spirit must reply, for those who hear, in the right answer which His voice gives—Wherefore and to what end do ye seek this? St James here gives the answer to us—*To this end, that ye may consume it according to your lusts.* One desires earthly good, that he may carnally enjoy it; another—

for example, the orthodox maker of divisions—would have power and consideration, the victory of *his* doctrine and opinion, that he may sinfully exalt himself; others ask for recovery from sickness, or relief in distress, but only that they may uninterruptedly live on as before. We must not interpret this expression merely of the actual *squandering* of the good things prayed for; but generally of that *application* and *use* of what is sought in carnal desire, which is most certainly no other than a wasting of it. Not merely is every external thing so created that it perishes in our hands, or in the using (Col. ii. 22)—but, generally, that which we have not and are not in God is presently diverted elsewhere, and continues not.

Ask, above all, and in all, for the good which Christ brings, and then ye ask not amiss: then will true peace dwell in your hearts, households, and lives; then will the warring lusts which engender hatred and envy, fighting and war, be suppressed. Those who are beginning to pray are not rigorously dealt with by God, if they, in unconscious impurity of desire, ask for individual blessings which must be denied; for He would graciously attract them, that they may learn better and better for what they should ask. But *you*, who have known what it is to seek and find grace, if you would pervert your access to God according to the flesh, must at least be repelled, if not most severely condemned, in so doing.

Finally, they cannot escape the word of St James, who supplicate even spiritual good and the gifts of grace for fleshly use. This is the most secret cunning of the evil heart; let him who finds it in himself, abase himself to the lowest point. Dost thou ask *wisdom* from God, as St James teaches, but not for thine own salvation, and thy perseverance in trial—rather that thou mayest exhibit before others thy wisdom, thy Scripture-knowledge, thy penetration into the counsels of God? Then wilt thou not receive, but be given over to the errors of thy folly. Wouldst thou receive the *forgiveness of sins* for false consolation, and a delusive pillow, perverting it into licentiousness? That would be shamefully consuming it, indeed; and, however secretly that may insinuate itself into thy request, thy asking will be amiss and in vain. Wouldst thou have deliverance from trial, *peace of soul*, but only to *have* and *enjoy* it, instead of using it to the glory of God in thy salvation—this is still impure desire; and

God will answer thee in His own better way, by plagues and chastisements, until thou fall under His mighty hand, and seek Him and His will, and not His gifts. But when this last and most hidden lust of the flesh, which puts on so spiritual a form, is removed, then will God's peace be great in the pure soul.

XXIII.

CONVICTION AND ADMONITION OF THE UNFAITHFUL.

(Ch. iv. 4–10.)

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth against envy? But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore unto God: resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.

St James now seizes the other side of that unrighteous and evil condition which he has to expose and condemn; or, rather, he brings up, from a still lower depth, a second answer to his own question—Whence cometh this? The first answer was:—From your lusts, which ye follow instead of the way of neglected prayer; or the sinful desires of which ye mingle with your evil prayer. But *whence* cometh this again among Christians, who have turned to the Lord in faith, in the Church which is called by His holy Name? What is this but *declension* and *unfaithfulness*, a breaking of the covenant of love and peace, in the bonds of which His people should have no other desire and design than His good-pleasure and His friendship? Thus he now proceeds further to address those who have become unfaithful to the Lord, whom they still know and confess; and to call them back to Him from their carnal and worldly estate. For he has to do with *brethren*, who would be so called, whom he has previously thus addressed (ch. iii. 1–12), and whom he refers to

again as such (ch. iv. 11). These forward teachers and disputants, these unpeaceful haters and enviers, had by no means relapsed from the Church into Judaism and heathenism; like many now who are not Christ-like in spirit and life, but who yet are not willing to depart from Church ordinances and discipline, maintaining at the same time a bond of connection with the Lord, though as unfaithful and covenant-breakers. This unfaithfulness may be so wicked as to merit the sharp words with which St James sets out; but there are, in connection with the *adulterers*, plenty of *double-minded*, who should have their due portion of this condemnation. This is St James' meaning, when he addresses now the one and now the other in this common Epistle. As his better readers would not lightly reject anything in it, which might seem not altogether to suit themselves, so let us in our day in such a manner distribute the word of truth that each may have his fit portion. Let us hear how St James first keenly rebukes the unfaithful, and then urgently and plainly shows them the way to conversion.

The *sharp condemnation* begins at once—*Ye adulterers and adulteresses!* A hard word of guilt and shame, even if it referred only to those sins of the flesh which the words ordinarily denote—the breaking of the bond of marriage among men. Although even in our own day there may be much more secret adultery manifest to God in Christian communities than is generally thought—what man would be able to endure the public rebuke of being an adulterer, and what woman that of being an adulteress? But that is but a slight thing in comparison of the sin which St James means. He uses the word in the same sense as that in which the Prophets used it, when they condemned Israel's apostasy; as that in which the Lord Jesus used it, when He rebuked the wicked and adulterous spirit of His generation (Matt. xii. 39), and when again, with reference to the future of His people, He spoke of an adulterous and sinful generation before which no disciple must be ashamed of Him and His words, who would not that the returning Son of man should be ashamed of him (Mark viii. 38). An evil race are all men by nature; but wicked and adulterous those only can be called who belong to the people of God, and yet live carnally and after the course of the world. St James explains himself more clearly, when he continues—Know ye not, that friendship

with the world is enmity with God? He that will be a friend of the world, will be an enemy of God! All that is in the world embraces more than mere Mammon, concerning which Christ similarly says that we cannot serve God and Mammon together; it is *possessions*, *lust*, and *honour*, avarice, pleasure, pride, which cannot consist with the love of the Father, according to an Apostle's well-known saying (1 John ii. 15, 16). There is no new preaching upon this point; for those who are now addressed, *Know ye not?* are very well acquainted with their lusts and adulterous ways, but do not want to know and think about them. Yea, ye unfaithful and fallen ones, who commit whoredom with the world and yet would be Christians—God has received you into His covenant, and ye have not utterly renounced this covenant, or thrown away your Christian name. But think what that name imports! Your God would have your heart, your whole heart, and therefore your whole life, and thought, and desire, for His pure and holy love; only because He so deeply desires to make you happy in that love, does He so zealously deal with your souls, to win them from the world. Have ye not, many of you, in actual conversion of the heart yielded up yourselves to Him, and renounced all sin and vanity, all the sinful lusts and desires of this world? "God is faithful; on His part this covenant is always sure." But, on that very account, ye should not break it! Christians, how stands it with you? Does St James' word touch you or not? God's Spirit *ought* thus to dwell in you, ought to rule and direct you in the way which is opposed to the way of the world. At least the *Scripture*, which ye hold and know, thus speaketh, and thus only.

Or do ye persuade yourselves that *the Scripture in vain saith*—The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth against envy?—We shall not enter into the discussions of the learned, as to the passage of Scripture, or (which can hardly be thought) the passage in St Paul's Epistles, which St James here cites in its true meaning. Literally these words occur no where, and I think that no specific passage is referred to; but it means that the whole of *Scripture* testifies, in many places, that God's Spirit dwells in His people, and that this Divine Spirit with a pure and holy desire or lusting withstands all the hatred and envy of the sinful nature. The carnal or natural mind is an

enmity against God, a hatred of His holy love. But ye are not carnal, ye are spiritual, if God's Spirit *dwell in you.* But he that hath not the Spirit of Christ, is none of His (Rom. viii. 7, 9). Whosoever hath this Spirit must, as all Scripture declares, be internally conscious of the same contradiction and warfare which exists without between God and the world. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other (Gal. v. 17). But why does St James say expressly *against hatred* or *envy?* Because the impulse and will of the flesh must be especially manifested in its contrariness to the love and peace of God; hence in the passage in which St Paul is opposing the works of the flesh to the fruits of the Spirit, most of his words tend that way—Enmity, hatred, envy, wrath, strife, contention, emulations, murder (Gal. v. 20). St James has had here particularly to do with bitter envy and hatred in the heart, and with the thence resulting strife and war among Christians. All this should be only in the world, in which, however it may be glossed over or veiled in deceit, the Preacher's word holds good—A man is envied of his neighbour (Eccles. iv. 4). All the love of the world is selfishness and selfseeking, consequently in its principle, hatred and envy: this is the evil love of nature and its wicked lust, against which the Spirit from God, the Spirit of pure and genuine love testifies and is zealous. Or, is there none of this found in *you?* Have ye no part, or no longer any part, in the words—The Spirit which dwelleth *in us*—? Yet, the testimony abides for you in *Scripture;* this its word convicts you from without, and even that is a condemnation of the Spirit. Do ye think, who have the Scripture and for whom it speaketh, that it speaketh thus to you *in vain?* that it is not truth, and most solemn truth? Woe, woe, if under the grace of the New Testament, that ancient cry of the Lord is renewed for you—Men, even Christian men, will not suffer My Spirit, My word, to convict, rebuke, and teach them!

The word of the Spirit, which points to the Spirit in the heart, has in it a great promise; it is a word of grace. This word, or God who speaketh in it, *giveth grace richly.* The Gospel announces how God would show in us the exceeding abundance of the riches of His grace, through His goodness towards us in Christ Jesus (Eph. ii. 7). Literally, it is

greater grace; that is, not only great, but increasingly and ever greater grace, in proportion as we believe the word and follow the Spirit. Assuredly therefore, something greater and better than all which the alluring, lying world promises and gives. To receive *grace* from God is in itself the infinitely greater thing, in comparison of all that is great. But to *whom* does God give grace, and to whom indeed not? The Scripture saith, again, in many places, especially in a saying of the wise Solomon, which St James here, like St Peter, quotes—*Surely He scorneth the scorners*, He resisteth the proud, *but he giveth grace unto the lowly* (1 Pet. v. 5; Prov. iii. 34). What a plain, deep, and mighty word of the Spirit which convicts all sin and directs the sinner into the plain and sure way of peace! What a testimony of God, piercing the heart and conscience, intelligible to all and yet never to be exhausted, combining in one the Old Testament and the New, all preaching of repentance and consolation of grace, the first call and the last admonition, essentially all in itself! He that heareth this in vain knows nevertheless that it is true. Mark *this* word, ye adulterers and adulteresses, that ye may be made wise by it, and learn the way of your conversion; and think not that the Scripture saith this *in vain!*

But is this great word, and all that St James adds to it, needless to *us* who through the grace of God, received and retained, have remained on the whole faithful, and have not so entirely turned away to friendship and fellowship with the world? Is this great word, and all that St James adds, *needless* to us? Can we think that to *us* the address should be—Ye, my beloved and faithful brethren, wholly sanctified, need no longer more grace? Alas, that would place us all at once among the proud and false, not the humble and sincere. Indeed, there is a distinction between living in full and continued adultery and the occasional decline from tender and entire fidelity: —yet is not every act of infidelity a breaking of the covenant, and deserving of severest punishment? We, who think we *know* that the friendship of God and that of the world, the lusts of the flesh and of the spirit, are contradictory and opposed—are we in deed and truth quite dissevered from the world, and perfectly obedient to the Spirit who dwelleth in us? Is there among us no vibration, or bias towards the one side as well as

the other? Are we so firm and faithful in the covenant, that there is no spot or stain to be found in us? Brethren, how much shrinking from the cross of Christ does the Spirit see to rebuke in us, how much hanging upon the world and compromise with it is still remaining within us! How often must the Saviour still cry unto our consciences—Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you! (Jno. xv. 14)—but not My friends, if ye do what *ye* will, and what the world requires! Who is there that can confidently enter into the Apostle's word, with reference to his whole spirit and walk—If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ! (Gal. i. 10). Therefore, at least be *warned:* He who will not in any point be at issue with the world, must be in that at issue with God, and *become* soon His enemy again! Be on your guard lest the Spirit should speak to you any of His words in vain; resist not the Spirit who dwelleth in you! Your faithful covenant-God is tenderly jealous of your perfect fidelity; He would give you greater, and still greater grace, than any you have yet received. Greater than ye conceive in your weakness, to present you at last faultless before His own face. But, until that high goal is reached, you must hear that same word concerning pride and humility by which St James has begun to show the way of return from infidelity.

Hear further how in the second part of this present section he *urgently and explicitly points out this way* of *return to God.* He has sharply rebuked, and now calls and invites them to come back; affectionately indeed, but with all that solemn severity which is due to the fearful peril of departing from the living God. The grace and graciousness of the appeal appears in this of itself, that the faithful God will receive the returned adulterers when they come. That which he forbade by Moses to His people, in His more abundant grace and kindness He Himself does; as we hear in the Prophet: "If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, *shall he return to her again?* Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet *return again to Me,* saith the Lord" (Jer. iii. 1). He gives His apostate people no bill of divorcement, that He might put them away (Isa. l. 1). And thus His servant James preaches afresh: *Be ye therefore subject to God; resist the devil, and he will flee from you!* St James speaks, as we

have heard, of an evil and deceitful *world*; he speaks of his own *lust* which seduces every sinner; but he speaks also of a *devil*, who is the prince and god of this world, who excites men's lusts and fans the flame of hell in their hearts. Satan is the prime and most perfect *enemy of God*, the beginner and finisher of all *pride* leading to apostasy from the Supreme, to whom all things should be *submissive*. He is the tempter to all disobedience, the ruler and perverter in all unfaithfulness; he holds out to fools the lure of freedom in their pleasures when they continue, or become again, his slaves, caught in his snares unto destruction (2 Tim. ii. 26). They who know nothing of the devil are most surely under his power. But the Scripture tells us the truth of God's faithfulness; it lays bare the deception, points out the enemy, and tells us that we may and that we must *resist* him. For God sues for our souls, that He may rescue them from ruin; for them there is the great contest between God and the devil. He who *will* escape from the devil, *may* do so; *Christians* most certainly have received the grace of God which declares—For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil! (1 John iii. 8). Now, ye adulterers and adulteresses, will ye wilfully run into the snares of the devil, or will ye be the ransomed possession of God, unto the praise of His glory? (Eph. i. 14). But ye must be subject to God! For there is no other bond of love and grace between God and His creature, no other friendship with God, than that which consists in obedience to God's commands. Thus Abraham in his obedient submission was called the friend of God; and fidelity to God in every one is simply the obedience of faith. Submit yourselves anew, then, ye rebels; humble before God, stand up with new earnestness against the devil, who misleads you in your pride! And let us, whom he ever seeks to lay hold of though we know him, whom he seeks to devour, if not with roaring yet with cunning, to turn away our mind from simplicity (2 Cor. xi. 3)—let us *withstand* him unto final victory, stedfastly believing in the power of that ever-increasing grace which is offered us! He that is born of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not! (1 John v. 18). Fall not into the frightful folly of too many insincere Christians, who impute all their sins and unfaithfulness to the devil; and say

that it was *his* work, when in truth their own flesh and their own heart gave heed to him and gave him room. From him who resists him through God, he *fleeth:* that is everlastingly true. Not indeed that one victory drives him to final flight; he returns again and again, sometimes immediately after the most shameful defeat. But he must fly, again and again, whenever he encounters that one word—Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve, to Him alone be subject! Before him who thus, in and with God, resisteth him, he fleeth as before the Almighty God Himself. But he who is tempted by Satan to lift himself proudly against the Supreme will find that God must resist him, and all that is devilish in him, even as He resisteth the devil himself. Then is it with the Church of Christ as with the ancient people of God. "He said, surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so He was their Saviour. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit; therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them" (Isa. lxiii. 8–10.)

Draw not nigh then to the devil; give him not advantage by meeting him midway with your lusts, so that he may touch you by them. Rather, *Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you!* This likewise is a great and most impressive word, like the former; never to be exhausted in preaching, and yet quite enough a sermon of itself. The same word occurs in the prophet, as addressed to God's ancient people: Return unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will return unto you (Zech. i. 3). And when God thus speaketh to us, that of itself is His own first drawing nigh to us, in the attraction of soliciting grace. Thus doth He ever; and when we begin in any degree to hear and to come, O how abundantly He responds, and comes to meet poor sinners! Who among us has not experienced this a thousand times? Which of you, ye adulterers, has not known this in past experience, or knows it not now in present? Let us draw nigh to God, Christians, for we have the abundant right of access in Christ! But, not like His ancient people, with your lips while your hearts are far from Him—with true and sincere hearts, rather, as is fit before the Most High. What then immediately follows in the presence of God? *Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.* Before God

we shall know what we are, and how it stands with us: either sinners, with those very hands which we would lift up to God, or deceitful and unstable in heart. To the former God cries—Your hands are full of guilt; wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil! (Is. i. 15, 16). The latter He keenly tests and reproves; to show them how double-hearted they are, how double-souled; and with what divided allegiance and imperfect submission and partial faith they appear before Him. Be not too hasty with David's word of comfort; I wash mine *hands* in innocency, and so compass, Lord, Thine altar! (Ps. xxvi. 6). Make your hearts clean; for without that not even the hands are pure.

This makes us all sinners, and in some degree double-minded; the most sincere in purpose will be the least of all disposed to refuse to confess their unfaithfulness. Those who most sincerely draw nigh to God will be most profoundly conscious how much they still need that greater grace. But He giveth it to the humble, the miserable, the penitent; therefore it imports all in their degree to receive St James' call to *conversion:* Where there is false joy and laughter, let there be lamentation! Where there is still pride in the heart, let it be humbled!

Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to heaviness, and your joy to mourning. This is the word which best suits the adulterers and adulteresses, who deeply need to come down from their proud and lofty elevation into a state of deeper and more troubled repentance: sorrow and lamentation would much better become them than laughter. Hear, ye blinded ones, and bow down your hearts to good counsel! The same Spirit of God who thus exhorts you will also excite within you sorrow, and give you tears, if ye only begin to yield Him His rights, and give Him room. Yea, begin at once to be wise! Say unto laughter, Thou art mad! and to joy, What doest thou? (Eccl. ii. 2). Did ye ever experience a first repentance towards God, ye sinners—why, then, have ye forsaken and forgotten that good beginning, and fallen into the miserable delusion of a vain joy? Turn back to the first sure ground of your covenant with God; ye have indeed double reason for lamentation and sorrow, as being covenant-breakers, and fallen souls. Or, did ye never thoroughly enter into that Divine distress without which at the beginning there can be no complete conversion

and salvation? Be in earnest now, at the last, for the matter with you is tremendously earnest!—But none of us are beyond the necessity of sorrow and lamentation. Our progressive sanctification, after grace received, does not go on in a proud and secure spirit: we must often go back to that original sorrow for sin; often appear before the throne of grace with the lamenting prayer which issues from a broken heart, in order that we may receive new and larger measures of grace. And, ye double-minded, especially, more or less divided still between God and the world—if ye would truly draw nigh to God, and make pure your hearts, how can that otherwise be than by a new repentance? Canst thou be so merry and satisfied, as if all were well with thee? or, even with hypocritical self-deception, make thy gladness known for joy in the Lord, while His Spirit findeth in thee so much to rebuke and condemn? This very perversion of all right feeling should be matter of bitter lamentation before the Lord! Canst thou so much succumb to the flesh, which thou shouldst crucify, as to be heard indulging in over-loud laughter like the fools (Ecclus. xxi. 29—whilst thou wouldst fain be reputed wise! Canst thou now and then forget utterly that that laughter of fools which Solomon calls madness is making a mock at sin; and find thy pleasure in that instead of in the company of the pious? (Prov. xiv. 9). Art thou so little under the discipline of the Holy Spirit, art thou so far gone from chastity of heart, that thou canst be found among the children of the world, sharing their filthy discourse, which should be to thee irksome wantonness? (Ecclus. xxvii. 13). Thou hast then much cause to weep before thy Saviour's face, to change thy perilous joy and merriment into *mourning*, or, as St James' word strictly means, into deeply humbled *abasement*. For there is still a wretched pride in thy heart; but as long as that is there, thou hast not ended with the great word of Scripture which St James repeats for all alike, with its exhortation and promise conjoined—*Humble yourselves before the Lord*,[1] *and He will lift you up*.

This word includes all, from the first conversion to the consummation of holiness. It is the whole plan of salvation; the unvarying and abiding rule for us unto whom *the Lord* hath come, who know Him, who belong to Him, and who would stand

[1] Not as Luther read—*Before God*.

before Him at the last. *Humble yourselves* in repentance, in obedience, in patience! The first cry of the Lord to sinners is, I am come to call you to repentance. Him that humbleth himself before Him, He *exalts* at once with the grace and consolation of forgiveness. But that is the preparation of the soul for a new walk in obedience; and, as far as that is wanting, there is the constant call to repentance. Humble thyself truly and altogether; subject thy desires, thy self-will, thy proudly refractory heart to obedience in His Spirit: when He ruleth thee, thou wilt be more and more exalted in the power of His grace, in order to the sure victory over sin, the world, and the devil. But thou wilt not attain to that without discipline from within and without, discipline which will still abase, afflict, and bow thee down. Endure all this; humble thyself under the *mighty* hand of God; so will He perfect thy obedience, and exalt thee *in His time!* (1 Pet. v. 6). Let that pride through which the devil fell, and through which he would cast thee down, be utterly and entirely abolished in thee; so that thou mayest know of nothing but humiliation before *the Lord*, who so deeply humbled Himself for thee. So shalt thou *through Him* be exalted, who saith not in vain more than once, "He that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted!"

XXIV.

EVIL SPEAKING AND JUDGING.

(Ch. iv. 11, 12.)

Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

Speak not evil one of another! Another of those exhortations which, both to the world and to the community of Christians, are so urgently necessary: one, therefore, which in a variety of expressions often occurs in the sacred Scriptures—from the ninth commandment, and the many exhortations of the Prophets, down

to the Lord's most weighty saying, Judge not! and the apostolical exhortations to lay aside all malice, and all guile, hypocrisies, envies, and evil speakings (1 Pet. ii. 1). But how does St James reach such an exhortation here? He has been beseeching and warning, *Humble yourselves before the Lord!* and this now follows quite consistently. For, that sinful and unbecoming judgment and evil speaking has always flowed from the pride which refuses to be humbled before the Lord, and which forgets its own guilt before the supreme and only Judge. At the same time, he thus returns to that which had occupied his mind since the beginning of the third chapter—the warning against sins of the tongue, which through hatred and pride lead to war and contention. He has spoken in ch. iv. 1 of strife and war among brethren, and then in ver. 2 of the underlying principle of hatred and envy: to the same chapter certainly belongs that evil speaking and judging from which so much disquiet, alas, springs, and which so fatally interrupts brotherly fellowship and love. Therefore St James first here inserts the convincing and mournful word, after the previous keen address—Speak not evil one of another, dear *brethren!*

What is that *evil speaking* which is so unbecoming to the brethren, and so strictly forbidden by the word and Spirit of God? Surely not every kind of speaking against the sin of others! If one summoned to bear witness of the truth before a judge, appointed to do right in the place of God, gives sincere testimony to a sin which has been committed, in order to its being punished, he does no more than his righteous duty; and the effeminate weakness which would conceal the truth would be no other than sin. When a minister of God, who should not merely beseech in the stead of Christ, but also in His name reprove and warn sinners, discloses the secret shamefulness of sinners' sins, it is only part of his faithful duty, and he would himself sin if he withheld it. When the preacher preaches, according to his Lord's commission—He that believeth not shall be damned! and says to every man who will not come to God's house, in faithful warning—Take heed, lest thou be among those who are condemned! no man can object to him that he is assuming the office of a judge. Nor even then, when he may find it needful and salutary to point one sinner to the plain example of another, that he may in him see himself as in a glass. When the most

humble Christian, without special office, but in the spirit of the common Christian vocation, tells an erring brother the truth in love, he only complies with the apostolical precept—Wherefore, putting away lying, speak *every man* truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another (Eph. iv. 25). Can we not, and should we not, all distinguish between what is good and what is evil? Should we not know, through the word and Spirit of God, what is spiritual and what is carnal, what are the works of the old man and what the fruits of regeneration? If we are thus to distinguish, we must, indeed, also judge the persons in whom we find the one or the other; we must, first of all, prove and judge in our hearts all that is seen in our fellow-men. For it is not written in vain—Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good! (1 Thess. v. 21). Similarly—The spiritual man judgeth all, and is himself judged of no man (1 Cor. ii. 15). Further, we may and we must utter our judgment in words, when it is necessary for others' amendment, or when we otherwise should lie; true judgment and testimony against our neighbour is in itself no sin, but, on the contrary, oftentimes a duty. For it is, once more, not written in vain—Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who make darkness light and light darkness, who call bitter sweet and sweet bitter! (Is. v. 20). St James might therefore, on the other side, teach with equal earnestness—Flatter not, and play not the hypocrite with one another, dear brethren! It is necessary that I should judge in my heart, in order to keep myself from evil, and hold fast only the good; love binds me to rebuke and warn my brother, in order that I may mend him and show him what is good.

But quite different from this is the proud and wrathful rebuking of the sin of another; and worst of all that frequent *evil speaking* which, though so constantly denounced, is the source of such plentiful disquiet. In that a man speaks, without vocation and duty, out of the overflow of a spiteful mind, to one concerning the sin of another; evil is spoken behind the brother's back, instead of being spoken honestly to his face. Thus in the Apostle's time the Gentiles spoke about the Christians; they would not see their good works, but spoke evil of them as of evil-doers (1 Pet. ii. 12). Thus do the baptized heathens among ourselves speak against the godly, of whom they say all

manner of evil falsely. If this is found among those who would be called brethren, the Holy Spirit denounces it most keenly; and teaches Christians absolutely to avoid it, even in speaking about the children of the world. Such speaking of evil can never answer the question—Should I say this of him, when he was present? Why do I not rather say it to himself? For what purpose am I saying it now?—In this there is no obedience to duty, no design of love; in it speaks the perverse, forward, proud mind; therefore it soon passes into false judgment, or into that *condemnation* which is forbidden, even when the matter may be true.

This is what St James means when he goes on—He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law. He is no other than thy *brother* against whom thou speakest in thy judgment: this he mentions again and again, with something of the severity of that word of the Lord to Cain, Where is thy brother? The voice of thy brother's blood—thy brother's blood by thine hands! Yea, thy brother is every man: first, as being thy fellow-man; then, as being, alas! thy fellow-sinner, thou sinner; and lastly, as being through Christ thy fellow-redeemed. In every view ye are alike, and stand before God side by side, when sin and judgment or grace are concerned. But thou, with thy evil speaking, liftest thyself above or against him, as if thou wert his lord and god, his judge! Elsewhere, the Scripture declares that such sinful judging on the part of man intrudes into the office of the Most High, and anticipates the verdict of the last day; but St James, who throughout his Epistle has the *law* especially in view, says yet more expressly—He speaks evil of the law, and judgeth the law. And this is, as has been remarked with force, the *last* place of the New Testament in which the word "law" occurs. What means it then *to speak evil of the law?* We observe at once, that the expression is a strange one, adopted for the sake of the striking parallel; and it seems to mean—Such a man, improperly and officiously noting and dealing with the sins of other men, *throws blame* thereby upon the *law* of God, as if it were not sufficient; for he acts as if he supposed it necessary to come to the help of the law. Consequently, he speaks evil of the law; to wit, that it is too weak and inert, unless he should also use his diligence. But it is not so, dear

brethren! Reflect, that the law is at least in Christendom everywhere taught and preached abundantly, so that young and old know it well. If thou, on thy part, dost exhibit to men in thy own conversation the fulfilment of the law; and, moreover, in all such cases as impose it upon thee as a duty, dost assist the pastors and preachers with thy words, as a servant and witness for God,—thou doest all that can be done. Then let people hear and obey, or not: God will vindicate His own commandments by discipline and punishment, by teaching and testimony in all His ordinances, as by His Spirit in the conscience. The law is administered by its appointed officials, who preach it to Christians as a law of liberty, or make transgressors feel it as a law of civil right and restraint. If thou art a judge, a master, a teacher or parent, a preacher or overseer of any souls, perform the function of thine office, without evil speaking. But be content with that, and do not go beyond, as if it were not merely written—Prove all things, and *hold fast that which is good*, but also—Prove all things, and *point out all that is evil*, speak of it, that others may know all about it! Or, as if the sentence prescribed, what it does *not*, however, prescribe—Prove *all men*, and have them before your judgment-seat! Reveal and mark them with words, if with nothing more! How many there are who carry this so far that all evil is under their censure, and they leave nothing unmeddled with and unrebuked.

Such a disposition to run needlessly into the province of the law, to prop it up, will soon be followed by something else which St James adds: He speaketh evil of the law, *and judgeth the law*. This can have but one, and that an evil meaning. He who *judgeth* his brother, judgeth often unrightly and unadvisedly, so that he *condemns* him. He mostly mistakes and deals wrongly with his brother's actions, because he cannot see into his heart; and does him the more injustice, the more diligently he seeks out his brother's wrong. He who condemns, intrudes into the judicial office of the law, takes its place; and this means, first, that he judges in the name of the law. But St James speaks here of his judging or condemning *the law itself*. If thou, that is, falsely judgest thy brother—as evil-speakers are very likely to do—if thou condemnest him where the rightly-applied law would absolve him—thou then knowest better what sin is than the law knows! And is not that to exalt thyself

above the law, and to mend it as not keen and exact enough? Finally, and this is worst of all—Thou wilt, in this meddling with the sin of others, forget thyself, and neglect thine own obedience. Thou art not set to be a judge, but shouldst before all things be thyself a *doer*, of the law.

But if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge! That means, assuredly, first: Thou *trespassest* by thine evil speaking and judging *the* law, which forbids such conduct; and, according to St James' earlier doctrine, thou hast become by this violation of one commandment guilty of the whole law; thou hast by no means fulfilled the royal law, Love thy neighbour as thyself! Thou hast not done well! (ch. ii. 8, 10). The law of love requires that thou shouldst spare and bear with thy brother, and rather hide than drag out his sin; but thou by thy conduct declarest that law to be too mild, thou condemnest and breakest it in one and the same act. So that where the one is found, *a judge of the law*, the other will certainly follow from it, *and not a doer!* The more we look after others, the less time and inclination have we to think of our own acts; the more diligently we examine the accounts of others, to detect and expose the errors of others, the less earnestly shall we investigate our own accounts; the more we seek to express our knowledge of good and evil in word and censure, the less vigour will that knowledge have in the sanctification of our own heart and life. This, alas, is the evil effect of pride and self-deception in every natural man before conversion, to see and seek for sin only without and in others; this the Holy Ghost will thoroughly do away in all who are His; but this is slowly accomplished, and the progress of many pious people is checked by their inveterate habit of judging others. When it becomes the confirmed practice of such Christians to make their infallible adjudications as to who are and who are not converted, who are awakened and who natural men, who are the children of the world and who the children of God; when they undertake to point with their finger to this and that man who is dead and blind, and still among the lost—they are in great danger of becoming hypocrites instead of saints. Avoid this, brethren, as the very plague of godliness! Set not yourselves up as judges in the place of Christ; dare not to anticipate the day when the Lord will come to separate between those on the right hand

and those on the left! Regard all as brethren, and as partakers of grace, against whom the plainest scriptural marks do not testify; and even in their case, do not reject utterly whom the grace of God may yet save!

There is one Lawgiver and Judge, who can save and can condemn. Lawgiver *and* Judge—so runs the more correct reading of the text: the Lawgiver is alone the Judge; thou, who art brother by the side of brother, sinner by the side of sinner, art neither the one nor the other! *God* will of necessity judge, and nothing shall be neglected at last; thou art under no requirement to come to His aid. God *can* save and condemn; He alone has the right and the power for that, and will awfully demonstrate it to the condemned in due season. But He will, as thou knowest and shouldst never forget, much rather *save:* this word therefore comes first! He delays so long the day of judgment; for He hath patience with us, not willing that any should perish, but that every man should come to repentance (2 Pet. iii. 9). How many now lost will He yet find; how many now fallen will He yet raise up by the might of His grace—whom thou, loveless and unforbearing, dost utterly condemn! Who art thou, that judgest another man's servant? To his own lord he standeth or falleth. But he may be raised up again, for God *is able* to make him stand (Rom. xiv. 4). Hast thou no pleasure in hoping for his re-establishment, wouldst thou rather inform against him than apologise for him—then art thou in that like the devil himself, whose name is the *accuser!* But the merciful God hath cast out this accuser, with all his vehement right in our sin; else wert thou indeed condemned for ever, and not saved. The Lawgiver will judge in the sacred right of mercy, according to the free law of love: remember that for thyself and for others, that mercy may rejoice in thee against judgment!

Who art thou, who judgest another? So speaks St James like St Paul. Art thou, shortsighted man, become omniscient before the time, before the Lord cometh to bring to light the hidden things of darkness, to reveal the secret counsels of all hearts, and to give to every man his own praise or blame? (1 Cor. iv. 5). Canst thou "trace home virtues and sins to their most secret source?" In the place of Scripture where we find the woes denounced against those who call evil good, and good evil,

there follows yet another woe—Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (Is. v. 21). *Human* judgment, as human, is shortsighted, inadequate; it is not valid before God, and therefore thou mayest spare thy needless pains. We sing of the day of judgment, that "then all the false imaginings of the world give place to changeless truth"—but we may say that all the yet falser imaginings of the children of God, in their judgment of the so-called world, will give place to truth! "No false witness avails here"—O how many accusations and testimonies will go for nothing then! Well said one: At three things I shall wonder in heaven. First, that I shall not find many there of whom I was certain; then, that I shall find many there of whom I was sure that they would not; but lastly, and most wonderful of all, that I am actually there myself.

And this is well. Be not too secure of *thine own* salvation, while thou art disposed to judge others! *Who art thou*, that actest thus? A sinful man; not yet, alas, as thy very judging proves, perfect in humility and love, but disposed to err from thy right way; disposed to meddle with others, before thine own affairs are thoroughly settled. *Who art thou?* In what art thou not yet a perfect *doer* of the law? Thou hast enough to do to judge thyself, to receive thy judgment of grace from the true Lawgiver and Judge: judge no man *before the time*, before the Lord hath come to thee, and held His judgment on thyself! Say with the Apostle in another sense—I judge, that is, I justify, myself not; *he that judgeth me is the Lord!* (1 Cor. iv. 3, 4). Always to remember this, is a sure antidote to all evil speaking and judging. Thus does a man humble himself before the Lord, and the humble He will exalt.

XXV.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF OUR SHORT LIFE.

(Ch. iv. 13–17.)

Go to now, ye that say, To-day, or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings; all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Here is, again, something that proceeds from the vain thoughts and untamed lusts of the proud heart, and which St James has to rebuke in the brethren: for in this short Epistle he warns and admonishes them on all sides. He has just condemned *the confidence* with which many assume to be judges of others, and find time to talk about others' sins, while they forget the judgment which is impending over themselves. Very naturally, he now passes over to the condemnation of that false security generally, in which men think not of death always near, and the judgment which follows it, but form plans and projects for which they think that they must needs have time sufficient. He once more rebukes their pride, and confronts it with the mighty hand of God, which ruleth all things according to His will. He exhorts us all earnestly to the diligent performance of every good work assigned to us, and thus carries back his subject to the previous requirement of good works generally. He reminds us, in the conclusion of this chapter, of the *uncertainty of our short life* between every to-day and to-morrow, which we all know so well, and so easily forget; and then selects from the many *admonitions which follow from it*, one thing only for his present purpose, as suiting his Epistle, and touching the main point with sufficient force.

How many *years* of life past every man reckons, he knows; but how many years, or only days, will yet be allotted to him,

he knows not. And his *not* knowing it is so sure and so solemn a thing, that he ought, as a reasonable man, and certainly as a called and warned Christian, to bear it in mind always when circumstances require him to think or speak anything about his future life. And, nevertheless, how common among us is the foolish language of the secure heart, which St James now begins to rebuke! Go to now, *ye that say*—To-day or to-morrow *we will* go into this or that city, and will stay there *a year!* O how daringly we plunge into the future, as if the years were at our own disposal! "Art thou, bold mortal, lord of the very next moment?" But those who thus speak are not sure merely of *to-day and to-morrow;* they even, as their language betrays, reckon on many uncounted years, of which they at first speak of only *one*, to determine how that shall be *spent*. Thus reckons, as we constantly see and hear, foolish youth, making free with the expanding future of long life; so it is with men in the middle of life; and old age is no defence against this folly. How many a man, the number of whose vanished years should effectually warn him, reckons after the old fashion, and has always at least *one* year in the future to talk of and scheme for! O the blindness, which never learns the lesson taught from birthday to deathday, which never takes a warning for self from the multitudes who drop off to the right and to the left! How swiftly hastens away our uncertain life! St James says only what the Jews and Gentiles alike had alway said, when he cries to presumptuous mortals—*What is your life? It is even a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away!* A mist and vapour, a fleeting cloud which passes under the broad heavens to nothing! A *little time* it is to be seen, before it has finished its rapid course. Does not the past appear to us all as if condensed into one single *Whence?* and *Gone?* Why do we delude ourselves to imagine that the future, which unalterably becomes the past with every moment, will be longer? Think of that always-hastening moment, when it will be finally said—All is gone for ever; no one year, no one day, no one hour more! Direct your thoughts to the eternal God above, that He may give you His grace to regard all time, and the little drop of your own life in the stream of ages, as it will be looked back upon from eternity! Every moment souls go hence most certainly, and which moment will be yours?

To-day and to-morrow will ye go there or there? *who know not what will be on the morrow, what a day may bring forth!* Boast not thyself of to-morrow — warns Solomon — for thou knowest not what this day may bring with it! (Prov. xxvii. 1). Literally: *What a day may give birth to;* it may have something in its womb very different from what thou hast in thy thoughts. O for the idle plans, projects, hopes, reckonings of vain men! But whence do they come? From the same lusts and desires concerning which St James said at the beginning of the chapter:—the looking eagerly for this or that infatuates the heart in a foolish pursuit of it. And what is it, after all, but a trifle of miserable earthly good, which these wise ones pursue year after year through life, instead of aiming at the prize of the high vocation? We will *buy and sell, and get gain:* thus they said in St James' time, and this word stands for many others. So they say now in the busy, scheming, Christian world. Our text is the sermon which our times of "material interests" so much need—when sacred industry, one might say, has become the only religion of many Christian men, the one moving power which sets all their souls in action; an address to men of commerce especially, the loss and gain registered in whose books should remind them of that infinitely more important *gain* and *loss*, of that very different reckoning which awaits them. O take care that every day a good balance may be to your account! Woe to those who fall into bankruptcy here! How much soever of Mammon you may have won, will it *make* you happy or *save you?*

They will not all, however, get gain. There are those who say merely—We will *enjoy life;* we will *abide* there, whither we go, or where we now are; we will spend the time as best we may for our pleasure, but without the toil and trouble of doing good. But the Lord may call you at any moment from the place which you so securely and idly occupy; He can very soon overturn the house in which you fix your rest, or even the whole city, where many like you do the same. And when you say, We will *do this or that*—your language is perverse and most perilous as long as you mean, *we will*, and nothing more, as if all depended simply upon that. *Will you* really accomplish this or that, in this or that manner effect your schemes? as if you were like God, as if all were possible to you, provided only you wisely plan and

perseveringly hold to your purpose! But between to-day and to-morrow that may apply to you which we find in the psalm—His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish (Ps. cxlvi. 4).

This is the essential insecurity of our transitory life—of which we are all so fully conscious, but which we so easily and sometimes so entirely forget. *What then is the exhortation which this requires?* There are many who deduce from it the most foolish consequences;—who do not indeed reckon upon years in the formation of their projects, on the contrary, they are constantly speaking of the vanity of human life;—who make it a reason, not for thinking of eternity, but for enjoying to the utmost the present day and hour, thinking that *all things* end with death. Such foolish people were pointed out in the Book of Wisdom: "Our life shall pass away as the trace of a cloud, and shall be dispersed as a mist, overcome with the heat of the sun. For our time is a very shadow that passeth away; and after our end there is no returning. *Come on, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present;* and let us earnestly use the creatures, while we are young" (Wisd. of Sol. ii. 4–6). But St James uses scriptural language, concerning life being a vapour, without fearing that his language might be that way perverted. Preaching to those who now come to God's house, we also have not that to fear: all know full well that another life of reckoning awaits, when this short life is past. But what follows from the solemn fact that any day we may die? Not, Christians, that we must hang in continual anxiety and doubt, losing in the fear of death all vigour of action, all courage and consolation, and waiting in suspense for the threatened doom. Be that far from us! He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death (Ps. lxviii. 20). The wise woman of Tekoa, whom Joab sent to intercede with David for Absalom, was cunning enough to say—For we must needs die, and be as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; because God hath not taken away his life, but doth devise means that His banished be not expelled from Him (2 Sam. xiv. 14). *We* have a Saviour, who hath died in our stead, and obtained life for us! But *have* we Him really? You who are not yet sure of this, who have not yet begun to press towards the mark of the prize of

the high calling in Christ Jesus, and *therefore* care about nothing but buying and selling and getting gain—can receive but one counsel, and that is, To-day rather than to-morrow to seek in true repentance salvation from the mercy of God in Christ. But we who know Him, and belong to Him in our hearts, though we may have been seduced into that foolish security which St James here condemns in Christians—may hear what now follows *for us* and the direction of our better thoughts. It is no other than the exhortation to *place our willing* absolutely from this time *under the will of God;* and that not merely *in the doing of what we will*, that is, in the execution of our permitted plans and undertakings, but pre-eminently *in diligent doing good according to the will of God.*

It is not St James' purpose to condemn the Christian's saying, under any circumstances, "To-day, or to-morrow, during this year, I will do this or that." For, we have all to ponder beforehand what it is our duty to do; he who should altogether refuse to do so would do *no good thing* generally, though *that* is matter of exhortation in the following verses. The good which is given us to do is not always the mere work of a day; it must often be the well-considered and continuous labour of patience, carrying out careful plans through many years. Moreover, as it regards the business and sustentation of our earthly life, we are commanded by God Himself to give all prudential diligence. But what the Apostle demands is, that all our plans be subordinated to the will of the Lord, who ruleth all things above; and that we say, "This will we do" indeed, but only "*if the Lord will.*" So St Paul to the Ephesians: "I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem; but I will return again unto you, *if God will*" (Acts xviii. 21). And again to the Corinthians: "But I will come to you shortly, *if the Lord will*" (1 Cor. iv. 19). We need not anxiously and literally add this word on all occasions, to avoid sin, when we utter any resolution. At another time, we read that St Paul determined in spirit to journey through Macedonia and Achaia, and thence to go to Jerusalem, and he said—Afterwards, I *must* see Rome also! (Acts xix. 21). He does not there add—If the Lord will. It is the over-anxious addition of this proviso which has given rise to the empty, thankless forms of speech which have become so common, such as "God save you!" and "Thank God!"

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We will, but only if the Lord will: that should be self-understood in our hearts; as it is self-understood with God that His will is supreme over all. And if this is the real earnestness of our souls, much will follow from it! Then we shall not only resign to the disposal of the government of God what should happen to us, whether the success or failure of our plans, whether we should go here or there; but the condition will be never forgotten—If the Lord will, *and we live.* My times are in Thy hand (Ps. xxxi. 16); the end of my earthly course at any moment Thou mayest assign. Our calendar gives us the longest and shortest days, the feast-days and festivals; but the last day of the world, which cannot be calculated like an eclipse, will never be there; and thy last day, O man, is not there marked out. Therefore, when thou lookest into the calendar of thy existence, forget not to look backwards to the old sins registered against thee, that none of them may remain unblotted out. And when thou reckonest forward, be sure thou form good plans for the right use of thy time of grace. It is short and fleeting; but *long* enough to seek and find salvation. He who redeems it, will have no lack; but the dreamers and sleepers will find the one day they calculated on too short. Time enough one day before death—said a Jewish sage when asked about this matter. But when it was further demanded—How may I know the day? he replied—Therefore begin to-day! Well for him who can in humility reckon upon and glory in the grace of God for preparation!

But to the rest saith St James, *But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.* Is it not the highest pride, when regarding our actions, to think that we by our own will accomplished anything, whether the Lord would or not? As the Prophet rebukes the proud in Zion, and those who were secure in the mountain of Samaria—Ye rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength? (Amos vi. 1, 13). Instead of that, we should always and everywhere say—Blessed be God, who hath borne with me, spared me, kept me, and strengthened me, so that *hitherto the Lord hath helped me!* Similar pride is it, when we think only of our own will in the prospect and provision of our plans; instead of saying, if we can with good conscience—May God give His blessing, and *help me still,* as it pleaseth Him. *He that*

glorieth, let him glory in the Lord! (1 Cor. i. 31). All glorying which forgets that is evil: in itself it is sin, comes from the sin of the heart, and worketh nothing but vain boasting, forgetfulness of God, and sin. Yea, all supposed good which man may effect with zeal, if it proceed from *this* glorying and this security, is not good before God.

Unprofitable servants are we all before God; that is certain, for all our ability comes directly from Him. But, because He makes us able, therefore we are under obligation to do all that is commanded us. *Diligently to do good, as we know how, according to the will of God*, is the concluding exhortation of St James, as better than such self-willed purpose to do this or that. If we are found diligently aiming in good works at the possession of eternal life, then verily our fleeting earthly life becomes more than a mere vapour which vanisheth away; then it becomes the seed-time of the great harvest of everlasting gain. Let us do good, and not be weary; for in due season we shall reap without ceasing! (Gal. vi. 9). This is our best buying and selling, and getting gain; and touching this we should every day say, *We will, Lord help us!* "Occupy till I come," saith the Lord, who giveth the pounds, to His servants (Luke xix. 13). *To this end*, we must observe the time and opportunity, while we have it. Every day when we ask for it, the duty of the day which lies before us gives its reply from God. Then should we say—This or that *I ought* to do to-day, *and that will I do*. But we must not think that it is enough, as many say, to mark each day with a good work; if so, the Lord would every day indicate to us specifically this or that to do. He has in His word declared to us His will, His will that we should do *all* the good that we *know* to do and *can* do. Again, St James tells us by the Holy Ghost—*He that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin*! All, everything down to the least, is included in that great word of the Lord Himself concerning the servant who knew his master's will and did it not (Luke xii. 47). Every one of us has the task of his life, and has for every day the task to do all the good that it is in his knowledge, and his knowledge in his position, to do. How much might be said upon this word of St James, which condemns the countless sins of omission even among believers; which urges us alike to repentance for the past, and a holier zeal for the time to come! But we will now confine ourselves

to a few remarks upon an obvious misunderstanding of these words.

What is the *good* which we must do? First of all, it is that one thing, from which every other good may spring, the great act of repentance and conversion, of believing self-consecration to God, and the continuing in this deed. Take care of the business of thy salvation, and neglect not the one thing which is needful! *Of that* never say, in the spirit of procrastination —To-day *or to-morrow;* for thou knowest not what shall be on the morrow. Not of that say even—After a year or so there will be time enough for it; first, I will for a year buy and sell, and then I will give diligence in those good works which the Lord expects from His redeemed people!—But be wise to *know* aright, how and in what a man truly does *that which is good!* Thus, for example (I give one instance only for many), it is not of itself doing good to our neighbour, to *give* him in sympathy all that he asks: we should sometimes know that unwise giving is not true benevolence, and should do to our neighbour what is *good* for him, though it be by refusing the alms which would do him harm. Further, when we are bidden to let our *moderation* be known unto all men (Phil. iv. 5), it does not mean a love which should always and under all circumstances show itself externally gracious. If *God resisteth the proud*, to make them humble for the reception of His grace, and the *best* thing He can do is thus to thwart them, it may be your duty sometimes to be His ministers in *this* necessary and good work. If you *can*, without pride on your own part, resist the proud, you will do him good. By this it appears that a sure *knowledge* belongs to the *doing*, if it is to be a good work; for the heart of a wise man discerneth both time and judgment (Eccles. viii. 5).

Brethren! Does not every one of us know to do much more good than he actually does? How much *sin*, then, how much guilt of idleness and neglect remains with us all! St James had before presented the very simple truth, and how do we deal with it ourselves? Do you say—O Lord, I *know* that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps (Jer. x. 23)? then direct not your own way according to your own will, but submit yourself to the will of the Lord. Do you say—I *know* in whom I have believed (2 Tim. i. 12)? then live as a righteous man by this faith; for

whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom. xiv. 23). *Do we know* that faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself; and do we *know*, further, that we are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, that all our *own* works are *dead* works; then let us, when St James urges us to *do good*, say in the full sense of his meaning—If the Lord will, and *we live*, if He giveth us the *life* which this requires! But the Lord *will* make us ready to every good work, that also we *know*: therefore let us ask and receive, hold fast and use His grace, which worketh in us all that is good.

XXVI.

THE MISERY COMING UPON THE RICH.

(Ch. v. 1–6.)

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together in the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton: ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he hath not resisted you.

Go to now! Thus St James takes up again the sentiment begun in ch. iv. 13, which has not yet been closed. But if we look carefully, we note that the Spirit, guiding his pen, gives him another conclusion than that which he had intended. For he would, when he began with the first *Go to*, condemn the proudly secure Christians, who had let their desires loose upon selling and getting gain; and till now he had those in his mind who would be susceptible of a better feeling, who would say, *if God will!* and do good when they knew to do it. But now a sudden spirit of prophecy seizes him; so that he is constrained most significantly to include those gain-seeking Christians among those unbelieving rich men who hasten forward the judgment already impending. This much is clear: in ch. v. 1–6 he speaks,

for the first and only time in his Epistle, to such as are without the Christian community, the rich and high-minded of Jerusalem and Israel, who cast out the just, and who continued to do to the disciples of Jesus what they had done to their Master. The *rich men* whom he must mean here are those already mentioned in ch. ii. 6, 7 : those who practised violence on *them*, the confessors of the Lord of glory, and blaspheme that good name by which they were called. In opposition to them stood, ver. 5, the poor of this world chosen of God, those who were rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him. Well for these *rich poor*, to whom all their trials should be pure joy, who in all their lowliness should rejoice in their being exalted! But woe to the *poor rich*, who have nothing more than their riches! To them St James predicts, as a prophet, and in the style of the old prophets, the impending judgment to which Jerusalem was doomed, the desolation of the land and all the misery which he, like the Lord Himself, speaks of as His coming to judgment and salvation. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh, the Judge is at the door! (vers. 8, 9).

As St James is not, properly speaking, addressing here the readers of his Epistle, so the enforcement of this particular exhortation is not expressly for the Church. But he predicts, in the hearing of Christians, the judgment of the unbelieving without; just as the ancient prophets were wont to let Israel hear the denunciations which God uttered upon strange peoples:—partly to encourage their confidence against the oppressing power of heathenism, and partly as a mirror to reflect their own danger of falling into the same condemnation. In this sense let us hear and consider the words of St James, touching *the misery which will befall the poor rich men* who shall have lived without faith in the one Redeemer.

It *will* come upon you, will suddenly fall upon you with manifold sorrows! So St James says at first; but then at once prophetically anticipates that future, and speaks to the miserable men concerning their riches as already corrupted, of their pride of life as already vanished and gone. Ye *have* lived in pleasure, and been wanton! Your treasures were nothing but low and perishable earthly good; your joy was nothing but transitory fleshly lust, which turned to weeping and howling. *On the earth*

was your portion and inheritance, your fatherland; ye would not learn in faith to look up to heaven, and seek for eternal good. "*Look now toward heaven*, and tell the stars: *So* shall thy seed be!" (Gen. xv. 5). That was the word which the Lord addressed to Abraham's faith; and the profound presentiment of his soul solicits every man upon earth thus to look up. Abraham believed, and Abraham more and more clearly understood, that to him and to his seed God pointed out a better and a heavenly home:—the same glory and glorification which *now*, in the fulness of the time, those who believe in Jesus have brightly before their eyes, since like Stephen they have looked up through the opened heavens to the Son of Man. But those who were not believers in this heavenly calling retained their earthly mind, and lived in their folly like those who should for ever abide among their earthly treasures and in the enjoyment of their earthly lusts! Ye have, indeed, *lived* and *been wanton* —that St James admits—probably, also, have sometimes afforded others pleasure in the expenditure of your abundance; but ye sought only *your own* pleasure, have *nourished* and fattened your own hearts! Alas, your *hearts*,—which, however, can never be satisfied with husks; ye have despatched your immortal spirits' deep need, like the fool who said to his soul—"Thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry!" (Luke xii. 19). Ye have lived all your days as on a *day of slaughter:* that is, first, as if there was nothing else in life but killing and feasting, like Nabal at his sheep-shearing, or, like those of whom the Prophet speaks—"And, behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine!" (Is. xxii. 13). And if the just lifted up his earnest testimony against this wantonness, or if only his example ashamed and condemned you, ye followed the impulse of your wrath, and scorned, rejected, persecuted, and slew him! "Therefore let us lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn;—he upbraideth us with our offending the law, and objecteth to our infamy the transgressions of our education. He professeth to have the knowledge of God; and he calleth himself the child of the Lord. He was made to reprove our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold;—let us condemn him with a shameful death; let us examine him with despitefulness and torture" (Wisd. ii. 12–20).

St James speaks, as there in the Book of Wisdom, concerning the oppression and persecution of the pious generally: Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he hath not resisted you. Literally, *he doth not resist you*—the poor just man, whom ye still persecute always. For that is the true ordinance of God—The righteous resisteth not evil. But the prophetic Spirit in St James utters here a deep and pregnant word. As even that description in the apocryphal book (which should be read throughout) becomes a prophecy of Christ, so St James—while he refers to all oppressed and persecuted just men, especially the confessors of Jesus—means pre-eminently that first great wrong which the proud and rich in Israel did to the Lord of glory; for He alone is *the Just* in the fullest sense. So speaks St Peter—But ye denied the Holy One and the Just! (Acts iii. 14). Similarly St Stephen—Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before (who in their own doom foreshadowed Him) the coming of the *Just One:* of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers (Acts vii. 52).

We know, moreover, that our Apostle, the writer of this Epistle, obtained, through the rigour of his adherence to the statutes of the Old Testament—for his weak brethren's sake uniting that with his perfect faith in Christ—the honourable surname of "James *the Just;*" and that not merely among Christians, but among the better-minded Jews themselves. But how affecting is the absence of that denomination here! He does not call himself by that name, or by that of the Lord's *brother*, which he was after the flesh; but, after the Spirit, he terms all brethren who with him believe in the Lord of glory. He speaks in such wise that we may take it as we will: either all Christians are in Christ the just; or, Christ alone, whom they condemned and put to death, was *the Just One.* Nevertheless, again—so wonderfully prophetic is here the inspiration of the Holy Ghost—he is constrained unconsciously to prophesy of his own person. A writer who lived soon after the Apostles, Hegesippus, relates at length the martyrdom of James the Just, the brother of the Lord, shortly before the siege of Jerusalem. The Scribes and Pharisees demanded of James, at the time of the Passover, that he should bear testimony before the people *against* faith in Jesus; they placed him in the tower of the

Temple, and said, "O just man, whom we must all obey, as all the people are erring concerning Jesus the Crucified, tell us how this is!" But their knavish flattery did not blind him; he knew well what they meant, and testified, though like Stephen in vain, concerning Jesus, that He was in heaven seated at the right hand of power, and would come again in the clouds of heaven. Then they cried, "Woe, even the just man hath fallen into error!" They threw him down from the pinnacle; and, as he was not dead, but kneeled and interceded for them, they stoned him.—Thus was the prophecy of his Epistle fulfilled in himself: They condemned and killed the just, and he resisted them not. Thus did he bear his testimony unto the death.

And so before him did the Lord Himself, the condemned Just One, declare to proud Israel and its mammon-worshippers the truth, which they would not hear. He bore constant testimony against their covetousness, and set before them the warning example of that rich man who fared sumptuously upon earth. In the Sermon on the Mount, which St James always has in view, He cried after the Benedictions—"Woe unto you, rich, for ye have your consolation! Woe unto you that are full, for ye shall hunger! Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall weep and lament!" (Luke vi. 24, 25). And so was it, even in time, historically fulfilled when the *misery* came upon Judea and Jerusalem which St James beheld as near, already at hand.

Ye have nourished your hearts—fattened them—*as in a day of slaughter!* This is, after the prophetical manner, a keen play upon words—*Ye yourselves* are rather the prepared victims for the great slaughter at the day of judgment. Ye have wilfully remained like the natural brute beasts which are born to be taken and destroyed (2 Pet. ii. 12). So Jeremiah spoke of the ungodly sinners being "pulled out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepared by God for the day of slaughter" (Jer. xii. 3). So prophesied Isaiah concerning proud Edom, "The Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumæa. And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the young bullocks with the fattened oxen!" (Is. xxxiv. 6, 7). So in the Apocalypse the angel summons all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven to the supper of the great God, that they might eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh

of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great (Rev. xix. 17, 18). Fearful is the severity of the righteous wrath which speaks of such judgments in the midst of the Gospel of grace; fearful the actual fact, when the fattened flesh of the scorners shall come finally to the slaughter!

Thus it is said concerning these poor rich men—Ye have heaped treasures together *in the last days*, the brief and uncertain days before your ruin. May not every day be to a mortal his last day, when God shall demand of him his soul? How foolish is all heaping and gathering together of earthly treasures! But as then the rich men clung to their accumulation, in those proper last days which preceded the destruction already threatening by many tokens, so avarice blinds men in all ages; they continue even to old age, and in the face of death, heaping up like fools. And so *in those last days* which will precede the final judgments upon the Christian world (concerning which the Spirit in St James here prophesies), the heaping up of riches and the wanton life of the infatuated will reach their highest point. And then will it be said—How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her! (Rev. xviii. 7). But so is it said even now in all history; so is it said to *every man* who belongs to those here addressed, in his own judgment and destruction, when it comes upon him in his death.

Yea, ye *have* lived in pleasure a few days *on the earth;* but if ye must then go forth, and be as the beasts which perish (Ps. xlix. 13, 21)—what will remain for you then? Ye have, under God's longsuffering, a few years had your way in buying and selling:—but when the vapour has vanished, what *loss*, what *ruin* awaits you! Only look aright at your riches—the canker and rust, the curse of unrighteousness, is already upon and within them, for a testimony of what will become of yourselves in the end! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and eat your flesh like fire. O had they but heard, when the Just One preached—"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven!" (Matt. vi. 19, 20). O that even in the last days, before the

weeping and howling came, they had acted on the advice—"Be afflicted, and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness!" (Jas. iv. 9). All your riches generally will then be *corrupted*, for all earthly good is of the dust and tends to decay. That corruption is already in them; from without as by the moth, from within as the rust. *Motheaten*, then, all the gay clothing with which you bedecked your vain flesh. *Cankered* your gold and silver! But can gold and silver rust? asks the foolish reader, who will not understand the wise *figurative* expression. Yes, verily, as St James means, your beautiful and pure gold and silver will rust! Look rightly at it, this mammon of unrighteousness, and you will see the evil rust upon it: do not injustice, selfishness, misuse, the guilt of sin, attach to mammon? This is its rust, which in due time will eat it as to all who have kept it and heaped it up as *mammon*. Let it not rust in your hands or chests, but make of it friends for your reception into everlasting habitations (Luke xvi. 9). Else wilt thou hear that word which wicked Simon heard—Thy money go *with thee* to destruction! (Acts viii. 20). Yes, verily, *with thee*—so means St James all that he has said about corruption, motheating, and canker: Thou thyself must corrupt as the food of worms; thyself, thy flesh will the canker eat *like a fire*. Therefore, the perishableness of thy treasures should be a *testimony* to thee that thou art perishing with them! For the world passeth away with its lust (1 John ii. 17). "Every work rotteth and consumeth away, and the worker thereof shall go with it" (Ecclus. xiv. 9).

O what a fire of wrath, what a corruption of death! Had ye but well considered, ye poor miserable men who get riches, that man "as a rotten thing consumeth, as a garment that is motheaten!" (Job. xiii. 38). And have you, the food of worms, despised the salvation of God, and cast from you the heavenly calling, only that after a few days of pleasure upon earth you may perish in your sins? O that you had heard the prophet's sermon—"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but My salvation shall be for ever, and My righteousness shall not be abolished!" (Is. li. 6).

When the judgment comes, the rust will break out, the *guilt*

will be disclosed and avenged. And what is that guilt? Selfishness, hardness, the want of that mercy which alone rejoiceth against judgment. Although what St James goes on to say is not literally and externally true of all the ungodly rich, yet the disposition of the heart is in all the same, as the plainest examples, occurring not seldom, show. *Ye* have lived in pleasure and been wanton; but the rich harvest of your fields, the great gains of your buying and selling, ye did not learn to distribute to the poor; ye have rather oppressed the poor, whose lot it was to produce your wealth. Behold, the hire of the labourers, who have reaped down your fields, which is kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them that have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have regarded the poor labourer, not as your serving brother, equal to yourselves before God, but as only an instrument of your avarice. Ye have muzzled the ox, which trode out your corn. And therefore what Job said of such oppressors is for you—"*The hungry bear their sheaves;* within their walls they must press oil, and tread their winepresses, and suffer thirst" (Job xxiv. 10, 11, in the right translation). In the present day how many like these work in our factories; how many neglected children, crippled into machines, labour for the wealth of the rich! Are the rich manufacturers in our Christendom always the first to take the lead in organisations for the good of the working classes? Sure it is, that St James' word is applicable to too great a number, and over many a proud palace the superscription might be written—"Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong! That useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work: That saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign because thou closest thyself in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him?" (Jer. xxii. 13–15).

The conduct of the despots of wealth, who will not know God and the Saviour of all, towards the poor labourers, *cries* everywhere in *our* ears loudly enough: how should it not come also into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth? of Him, who in the law of Moses said:—Thou shalt not oppress the hired servant that is poor and needy... lest he cry against thee to the Lord,

and it be sin unto thee (Deut. xxiv. 14, 15). When that sin is visited home and avenged, the word will find another awful meaning—Ye have heaped up *treasures*, treasures of wrath, and accumulated the debts of an infinite bankruptcy.

But ye *brethren* who are not directly and personally affected by this, take them nevertheless for an example; let these words have the effect upon you which St James intended them to have upon his believing readers. Ye poor and oppressed, take comfort in your better treasures; nor let it enter your minds to envy the rich. And, ye godly rich, learn still more and more not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God; to *do good*, and be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, and thus lay up for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that ye may lay hold upon eternal life (1 Tim. vi. 17–19). Have we thoroughly learned, as rich and poor, these great lessons? Are we giving all diligence, with undivided hearts, in this the seedtime for the eternal harvest? Do we all know how profoundly true it is that riches and earthly good are not merely in themselves vain things, but things full of danger? Do the poor, who believe in Jesus, keep themselves free from all undue desire to be rich? Is there no unhappy canker in the gold and silver of those who are rich? Do we live and act on the firm persuasion that nothing can be more foolish than to heap up treasures in the last days; and nothing more wise and blessed than to make all our possessions serviceable to the glory of God and the good of our neighbour? Let us, who bear the Lord's testimony before those who are without, take care never to be found in any such practice of buying and selling as would reduce us to a level with the condemned, instead of causing them to bethink themselves of their ways. Let us for ever pray—Incline mine heart to Thy precepts, and not to covetousness! (Ps. cxix. 36).

XXVII.

PATIENT WAITING.

(Ch. v. 7–9.)

Be ye patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Groan not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the Judge standeth before the door.

What is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little time, and then afterwards vanisheth away. And this afterwards, how *soon* will that be present! How short and transitory is our life! Nevertheless, to some it is *too long;* they would wish their life shorter, to get rid of all their trials and cares. And this is marvellous enough. But it shows us that *time* in itself is nothing; it becomes short or long according to what it includes and results in. It comes from the hand of God, but it is given into our hands. How dost thou regard the time of thy life? Is it too short or too long to thee? It is too short for thine earthly projects and plans, so that thou requirest a longer future than ever will come? It is too short for the enjoyment of thy pleasure, so that the present moment hastens away before thou hast properly enjoyed it, and thou wouldst vainly hold fast and increase the days of joy? Then will thy life be verily *too short* in the end. Misery will suddenly *come upon thee*, and then—thou *hast* lived in pleasure on the earth! The fear of the Lord prolongeth even the *few days:* but the *many years* of the wicked shall be fearfully *shortened.* The hope of the righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish (Prov. x. 27, 28).

Ye righteous, only wait in patience, and let not the time be long to you! Ought you not rather to think life too short for the attainment of eternal salvation? Ought you not rather to want more *time* for making absolutely sure your calling and election? Instead of this, how often is the waiting to the end

too long to the pious, because they are wanting in that true *patience*, in that *true* waiting *on the Lord*, which is the object of St James' present exhortation!

He turns once more from the severe condemnation of the unbelievers to the proper readers of his Epistle, to the *beloved brethren*, to those who needed consolation among the Christians. And now, after having had much in the earlier portion to rebuke, he goes on to the end in a strain of *gracious* appeal. He comforts the oppressed, those who were afflicted by the proud rich; he comforts them by the same argument which had been a threatening to the others, by that speedy coming of the Lord which will bring judgment to the self-confident and salvation to those who wait in hope. The *Judge* and the *Deliverer* stands before the door: to His own, His coming brings the *summer* (Luke xxi. 30)—the harvest of the precious fruit of the good seed. Is not this, generally, still true of us all, though not in the particular meaning which St James had in view? Did not the Holy Spirit give him a word of exhortation for all times? Let us then observe *the life of the Christian in time as a patient waiting for the near approach of the Lord.* We see first *what that is in itself;* and then what here *follows from* it.

The Christian not only waits patiently for the precious fruit at the end of his probation, but *receives* also patiently the needful *rain and blessing* during his life; and with this waiting, the end is still ever near at hand. Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruits of the earth, and is patient; for, between seedtime and harvest the ordinance of God in nature requires its time, and the husbandman who could not wait that time would never reap and probably never sow. True, it is only fruit of the *earth*, but still in its kind it is *precious* fruit. Indeed, such owners of land as those who were previously rebuked, whose oppressed labourers reaped the harvests of their hoarding avarice,—do not truly enjoy, they do not understand and treasure up the precious fruit of the earth. Their eyes have not waited for it as a gift from the hand of God; they have perverted and misused God's gift into idolatry, as the sins of men pervert all earthly blessings into curses. But *we*, dear brethren, should rightly understand St James when he speaks to us figuratively of a quite different and more precious seedtime and harvest for heaven, which takes place upon earth. Every year

the parable is renewed, to which the Lord often pointed, and which His servant here brings near to our view in the little word *Behold!* The whole age of the world, with the millennia of mankind upon earth, is a great seedtime for the last harvest, in which the earth should give its fruit to heaven, after having from heaven received the seed. When the harvest comes, we shall understand the ways of God. Many things appear to us now dark and confused; let us only wait for the period of ripeness and consummation! The same holds good of every man for his time of grace, and in the most important sense of every true Christian who really lives for eternity. Our days and years are strictly measured out in the Divine appointments of the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord Himself, in the flesh, *waited* thirty years before He began His work as the Sower; and in this time of waiting, what was the secret work of His own growth and increase up to His Divine-human maturity, before which He might not work! But then, also, what glorious fruit resulted from that brief seedtime for Himself and for the whole world! He gave Himself up as the blessed seedcorn which should bring forth much fruit; and all our sowing and reaping since has been only fruit of *His* sowing, as He said to His disciples—Herein is the saying true, One soweth and another reapeth! (John iv. 37). Again, if we are to be full partakers of His grace and redemption, is not new *time* required, labour and patience between the sowing and the harvest? But here also the fruit is *more precious* than any harvest may be in this world: for it is the fruit of righteousness sown in peace (Jas. iii. 18), it is our own salvation. Is not this worthy of a short waiting? Then will the poor be rich, when they receive the inheritance; the sorrowful will be joyful; the waiters unspeakably rewarded. Well for *us* if we then hear it said—Ye *have* endured upon earth; behold, your reward is great in heaven!

Till then, the seed must grow and ripen under the Lord's *patience* and ours. For, the kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. *But when the fruit is brought forth,* he putteth *immediately*

the sickle in, because the harvest is come (Mark iv. 26–29). How then does the seed grow, that *he knoweth not how;* and who is he that knoweth not, who has only to *wait* night and day? Properly speaking, the Lord refers only to our labour upon others, when we toil as labourers under the great Husbandman, as under-sowers in the service of the great Sower. But it has also its application to our own hearts, the secret growth in which unto full perfection is in part concealed from our own eyes; only that we must at least *know* that there has been a sowing, and that the harvest in us is approaching. The Lord Himself *knows* concerning the seed, and every particle of it, its own necessary and appointed time: therefore is *He patient* till His coming for the harvest of the world. After He had offered once one offering for sins, He sitteth on the right hand of God, *and waiteth,*—not only till His enemies be made His footstool, but also till all His people are born to Him and nourished up, till all the sanctified are *perfected* through His offering (Heb. x. 12–14). Brethren, the Lord Himself waiteth patiently —and will ye not wait, would ye know better than He the time of the precious fruit? Let us once more look carefully into St James' similitude—Who is strictly speaking the *husbandman?* He does indeed mean ourselves, as we have understood, but he also more secretly indicates the great Lord of the harvest. In this sense we may translate—The Lord in heaven is patient, until *it,* the precious fruit of the earth, *receive* from His own hand the early and the latter rain. He gives all that is necessary for its prosperity; because, without it, He would not find the *fruit precious,* as He would have it, and worthy of His appearing.

Therefore, let us also be patient as He is, and gladly *receive* from His hand the needful rain and blessing which alone brings the fruit, and which will make us ourselves the ripe fruit in its season. Luther has strangely erred with his *morning* and *evening* rain. God promised Israel—I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the *former rain* and the *latter rain* (Deut. xi. 14). He rebuked, by the prophets, the apostates, because they did not say in their hearts—Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season; and who reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of harvest (Jer. v. 24). There were the two seasons of rain in

the Holy Land, the one early in October and November for the seedtime, the other late in March and April, shortly before the harvest; but these signify all that God does and bestows in the interval for the prosperity of the growth. In earthly things, He is often constrained to shut the heavens in punishment, to send drought and famine; and so far the similitude does not here hold good. In regard to the fruit of the kingdom of heaven, He gives nothing but His blessing; the misgrowth is our own fault alone. Thus to the last He sent down upon unbelieving Israel the same rain of grace in the Gospel and apostolical preaching, which only in the believing produced its fruit. The Apostle Paul, when he like St James here classes together the condemned and the saved, says—"The earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, *receiveth blessing* from God. But that which beareth thorns and briers (although it received the same rain) is rejected, and nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned" (Heb. vi. 7, 8). Itself perverted the gracious rain into the mildew and fire of curse! O how had God cultivated His Israel, that when Christ came it might bring forth this fruit to Him! How constantly and how faithfully does He now send down upon Christendom His pure grace, the rich blessing of Abraham in Christ!

What then is this rain and blessing which every one of us receives? Before all, the word as the seed, the gift and power of the Holy Spirit in the word. But, in addition to this, the Husbandman, who Himself sends the weather also, appoints to all discipline and dispensations of good and evil which should serve for the welfare of His people. Not *we* are the makers of the weather for God's harvest in us; we must patiently receive it, as He wisely appoints it. We know not ourselves what the weather of a day may bring forth. But we *receive* meanwhile in obedience and patience, at God's own time, the early and the latter rain. Let us rightly understand this mystery! There are storms, which blow upon God's garden, that the spices thereof may flow out (Cant. iv. 16)—these are our sufferings and our tribulations. Even the harsh frost of winter covers and nourishes the tender seed. Therefore be patient, brethren, *until* the coming of the Lord; be *ye also* patient, even as the Lord Himself is; take all things from His hand which

He appoints for the precious fruit. Ye *sufferers*, too, mourn not over the time of storm or rain as lasting too long; were it no longer necessity, it would not come, but the Lord would come instead with His sickle unto the harvest. Does it seem to you too long? Perchance that which you mourn over is the *last rain* shortly before the harvest, and which could not be withheld. Therefore receive the consolation which is sent you in your trials—*Count it all joy!* Let your faith regard the joy of harvest as near; and let your patience have a perfect work till the end.

Till the end? But that is not far off! Near it is, brethren, nearer than your impatience thinks; only your weakness of faith throws it into the distance. The Christian, while he waits, nevertheless keeps the end always near to his view. St James could in his day predict—The coming of the Lord is at hand! And his word was soon confirmed. But after this first typical coming of the Lord to judgment upon Israel, the faithful always regarded the reserved and proper day of judgment and redemption, the last coming of their Lord, as *near*. The New Testament, and the whole of Scripture, concludes in the Revelation of St John with the repeated assurance—The time is at hand! Behold, I come quickly! (Rev. i. 3, iii. 11, xxii. 7, 10, 12, 20). The same answer and exhortation has hitherto held good for all times, in which the Spirit of the Church has longingly cried—Come, Lord Jesus! Through the whole of true Christianity, and in the hearts of all the holy, there lives a perpetual realisation of the end; and that is as it should be. *Our* present cold thought and contemplation of it, which puts the last day into the far distance, is a consequence only of our lukewarmness of faith and impoverished love. Is it not of the nature of all earnest and long ing *waiting* to bring near to itself the object of expectation? Can those who love the Lord's appearing (2 Tim. iv. 8) endure to regard it as a distant and clouded futurity? Is not a constantly expecting preparation better than the wicked servant's spirit—My Lord cometh not yet? (Matt. xxiv. 48). To him it is said instead—Behold, I will come *to thee* quickly! (Rev. ii. 16). It is the will of God that there should be a reality in the continual presentation of the coming of the Lord as near. Every generation should wait for His day, for to every generation and to every mortal the Lord already comes in death: the

interval between that and the last day will indeed be to the faithful shorter than we sometimes think; and the decision of the death in any case is closely connected with the final end. Because for wise reasons this interval is concealed from us, and the day of our death is dark, the Scripture sets before us instead the day of Christ's revelation as the bright goal of our expectation: believers are called generally in the New Testament (since the Lord's parables) those who *wait for* the Lord. He that liveth soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, *looks for* the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour (Titus ii. 12, 13). Those who are turned to serve the living and true God, are taught thereby to *wait for* His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivers us from coming wrath (1 Thess. i. 9, 10). When He shall come a second time, He will come for salvation to those who *look for* Him (Heb. ix. 28). And we all know the great word—Our conversation is in heaven, from whence we *look for* the Saviour! (Phil. iii. 20). This waiting of believers is the mystery of their life in faith, to which the future is even now in the present; thus, if they walk in the light of the great day, their whole conduct is at once a *waiting for* and a *hastening unto* the future of the day of the Lord (2 Pet. iii. 12). At once awaiting and hastening—may seem a contradiction to the understanding; internal experience reconciles them, when we are taught of the Spirit as *longingly*, as *patiently*, to live for the day of the Lord.

If thus our whole life in time is, as becometh Christians, a *patient* waiting for the *near* approach of the Lord—what follows according to the word of our present text? This waiting *strengthens the heart* in all good, *warns and confirms* it against all evil.

Be ye also patient, and *strengthen your hearts!* Thus St James means no idle waiting, no dreaming and enthusiastic looking upward to heaven, which forgets the earth upon which the precious fruit must ripen. The earthly similitude for heavenly things does not here hold altogether: the husbandman must, after the preparation and sowing, almost *only* wait; he can do but little for his field, upon which the rain cometh down. But in the spiritual seedtime and harvest there is hard work in the interval. The Lord above waits *and works;* and in His work-

ing we also secure our salvation, in the continuous seed of good works and salutary sufferings. Let us *do good*, while we have opportunity, and faint not; so shall we also reap in due time without ceasing! (Gal. vi. 9). Every truly good work is one seedcorn more, for the increase of the ears and sheaves; but every sin of omission is itself a deduction from the full reward. For he that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin! Therefore strengthen your hearts to labour, as Azariah the son of Obed exhorted—Be ye strong therefore, and let not *your hands be weak;* for your work shall be rewarded (2 Chron. xv. 7). So the holy Apostle: Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. xv. 58). But the great and fundamental work is that of *patience*, which receives the rain and endures the heat until the fruits be ripe; receiving and suffering as from the Lord all discipline and correction. This patience is strong in faith, and firm in the hope of the certain *promise;* it is immovably unmurmuring toward God, and humble toward man; silently submissive, and therefore deeply strong. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (Is. xxx. 15).

Thus we are then further warned and defended against every evil, against even that slightest and most secret guilt of the heart which might be exceedingly evil in its consequence. *Groan not one against another*, brethren, that ye may not be condemned! Behold, *the Judge* standeth before the door. Where there reigns that patient temper of the heart which waits for the Lord, and looks for the precious fruit, there can be no room for gross external sins against the law of love. Therefore St James does not *here* allude to them; he does not even say as before—Speak not evil one of another! For he who does that, has already forgotten entirely the Judge and the compassionate Saviour. The suffering just man submits to be judged—like his Saviour, from whom his righteousness cometh—even unto death, and *doth not resist.* St James takes that for granted: but are we not merely to *sigh?* Is not that demanding an impossibility? Let us, however, understand it aright. The sighing of the suffering oppressed is not wrong in itself, and can never cease. We sigh *over* the ungodly in their misery. Those

who took away the sheaf from the hungry, Job says, made men groan from out of the city (Job. xxiv. 12). And Solomon says —When the righteous are increased, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people sigh (Prov. xxix. 2). They sigh to God, the Judge and Avenger, the Helper and Redeemer. Even the Apostle recognises a sighing of the husbandmen over unfruitful fields, when he says—"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with sighing: for that is unprofitable *for you*" (Heb. xiii. 17). But quite different is that sighing *against* one another, which might become the cause of our condemnation. The oppressed Church crieth and mourneth to her Lord, like the poor widow—Avenge me of mine adversary! and His elect cry day and night to their patient God! (Luke xviii. 3, 7). But they well know him who is the essential adversary, the Devil; as it respects persecuting men, they sigh not and cry not for vengeance, but pray for them who despitefully use them, as children of Him whose sunshine and rain of grace are never withheld while the day of mercy holds out. Be ye therefore patient, brethren! Murmur not against God; groan not against the sinners whose misery will quickly enough hasten upon them; wish not, against the patience of the Lord, that the judgment would come, which will soon enough recompense fearful tribulation to them that trouble you, and bring eternal rest to you who are troubled (2 Thess. i. 6, 7). Least of all sigh against *one another*, ye that are yet *brethren*. Let every one bear his brother's burden, and have patience with him in his weakness. Let no man complain to God against his brother for giving him a heavy burden to bear. For he who thus groans against him, has not forgiven him; and he that forgives not, shall not be forgiven, but shall be *condemned!* If the Lord come to thee, while thou art murmuring in bitterness and without love,—what judgment might befall thee! Therefore *still* your hearts before the *Judge*, even as ye stablish them before the Redeemer. Behold, *the Judge* standeth before the door—this is always true *until* He cometh—not merely as it respects them, but also in your own case. He standeth before *the door* of your houses, your hearts; He hears and marks your sighing, which is not concealed from Him; He reckoneth all righteously for the

future fruit. Be patient! If any man suffer, let him cry to the Lord, and He will be near to him, and strengthen him by the prospect of His speedy coming. But in all his lamentation before the Lord, let him not groan against his neighbour: so will the Lord receive him, and make him by His Spirit patiently ready for the precious fruit.

XXVIII.

THE EXAMPLES OF SUFFERING AND PATIENCE.

(Ch. v. 10, 11.)

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

"Be patient! Sufferings are to men inevitable; and in this there is the goodwill and counsel of God. Tribulation and trial is wholesome: it tends to improve, test, purify, confirm them. Be ye specially patient, ye children of God, ye disciples of the Lord Jesus; for that ye suffer a while with the Lord Jesus is the appointed and foretrodden way for you to all the greater glory." This is the doctrine upon which all Scripture expatiates; and herein is this Book of books incomparable, that it constantly and faithfully gives the right word of instruction and exhortation to those who suffer—that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope (Rom. xv. 4). But still more strongly do the *examples* encourage and affect us—the living examples and narratives which bring these great truths most clearly before both our ears and our eyes. This the gracious God well knew; and therefore, as life is everywhere rich in teaching and warning examples, so is the history of God's people in the Scriptures rich in personal instruction. St James turns to them after his exhortation, and points us to the *examples of suffering and of patience.*

Examples of suffering generally—are everywhere to be found; we need not go to seek them in ancient books, or even

in the Scriptures; no human life is altogether without them. If your own has been hitherto nearly free, look around and see how others are called to suffer. Ask the physicians and pastors, who have to do with men's sufferings in body and soul; ask all who know what human life is; look where you will into the histories of the present and the past:—examples of suffering are nowhere wanting. If sudden tribulation come upon your happy and sheltered life, and you first think it strange (as men commonly do), as if some *strange thing* happened to thee (1 Pet. iv. 12)—then look around, and you will see that it is only the common lot of the children of men. We generally then first really mark the sufferings of others, when we become their fellows in suffering. A very small thing possibly may cause us to cry out at once—Why am I thus smitten? and much too soon we adopt the song—Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me! (Lament. i. 12). Behold and see yourselves, and you will find everywhere what will rebuke your impatience. How would it be, if those sufferings were to fall upon you, examples of which may be seen in this or that man?

But why do we speak merely of examples of *suffering?* How great is the difference in those sufferings, according to the manner in which the sufferers bear them! Some there are who receive joyfully the hardest afflictions, or at least so patiently and resignedly, with all their weakness, that they learn to endure them better and better the longer they continue and the more they increase! Others make to themselves great burdens out of little troubles, kick as foolishly as vainly against their trials, embittering their own lives and the lives of all about them! Hast thou been such a stranger and pilgrim in the world as not to have seen these things? *Examples of impatience* are never far to seek; and it is a good thing to behold them, that we may learn lessons from their folly. But much better are those examples of suffering *and patience*, of which St James here speaks. They are not so plentiful as the others, but, thank God! there are enough to be found, if we inquire for them. It is for us to learn, to *take* what we find as our example. And why should we not also, if the Lord will, become such blessed examples ourselves? To *give* an example of patience, is among the most precious of good works, more precious than many of those good

works which you complain against affliction for denying you time to perform. How many have transmitted to children and children's children the touching image of their patience, as the good seedcorn bears fruit long afterwards, preaching more livingly than all doctrine—The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit! (Eccles. vii. 8).

All this St James presupposes; and to all this he points, when he begins to speak of the *example* of suffering and patience. But here he has specially to do with the brethren's sufferings for righteousness' sake; with the oppression, persecution, shame, and opposition, which Christians encounter as Christians: therefore he would excite to patience by examples. He might have referred the one class to the example of the other, the impatient to the patient; but because he cannot, in this general Epistle, give prominence to individual personal characters of the present, he turns to the past, which still better exhibits the counsel and will of God that His people must suffer, as a counsel extending to all times. He turns to the histories of *Scripture*, which he presumes his readers to be acquainted with, or would thereby excite them to seek out. He acts like his Master, in the Sermon on the Mount (which he has steadily in view through the Epistle), when He counted the persecuted for righteousness' sake happy, and said—For so persecuted they *the prophets*, which were before you! (Matt. v. 12). Thus, here—Take, for example of suffering and patience, *the prophets*, who spoke in the name of the Lord. Who spoke *to you*—is not in the original text: it is, indeed, true that they always spoke for us and to us, as to the fathers; but St James omits this, where he is only indicating the high dignity of the elect messengers of God, who notwithstanding that dignity suffered so much. To speak in the Lord's name to His people, to His men—what an honour is this; but also what a source of distress and scorn to all the servants of God, and witnesses of His truth! Look only to their life, only read the histories of the prophets in Scripture, and *take* the example which they give! That is, in a certain sense, the great fundamental example which the Spirit of God sets before you.

Should not the ancient people have received their prophets as angels of God; as in the beginning the Galatians received the Apostle Paul,—who, if it had been possible, would have plucked out their eyes and given him? (Gal. iv. 14, 15). Alas,

as they turned against the Apostle, and held him as their enemy because he told them the truth (ver. 16), so was it with the ancient prophets! The very people who boasted that theirs were the prophets, persecuted those prophets; their posterity adorned their graves and monuments, but their fathers had killed them. In the fatherland of the prophets, not one of them was accepted; the Lord, like St James, set forth *the* prophets generally as sufferers; and Stephen boldly asks, *Which* of the prophets had not been evil-entreated in his time? (Acts vii. 52). That which the New Testament expressly asserts, was in the great mercy and gentleness of God recorded in the Old Testament of but few, and nowhere in these direct terms. Yet we hear once, in the prayer of Nehemiah—They slew Thy prophets which testified against them! (Neh. ix. 26). Leaving out of sight what the traditions and histories of the Jews (sometimes true enough) record of many, such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Amos, we need only remind ourselves of what is merely narrated in Scripture.

Take, for example, the first great prophet, *Moses:* how he at the outset, before the Lord called him to speak and save and judge in His name, was obliged to *endure* for forty years among the sheep in the wilderness; and how full was his great office, from beginning to end, of burden and care. In Egypt and at the Red Sea, in the wilderness and on the border of the promised land, the word was fulfilled which he said to his Lord —Behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice (Ex. iv. 1). All past miracles are forgotten, if new ones do not quickly follow; and always the people murmur against this Moses. Did he not cry in Rephidim unto God—What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me! (Ex. xvii. 4). Read all these narratives, and marvel at the patience of forty years of such complaints! When it once came to such a point that his sister Miriam the prophetess, and his brother Aaron the high priest, spoke against him, and said—"Hath the Lord, indeed, spoken only by Moses? Hath He not spoken also by us?" a later transcriber of the book, in which Moses calmly related all as if he spoke of another, must needs interpolate the words—"Now the man Moses was much tried, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth;" and we may understand it—"the most patient" (Num. xii. 2, 3).

Take again, for example, that second great prophet and worker of miracles, who, with Moses, spake to the Lord Jesus concerning His sufferings on the Mount of Transfiguration, *Elijah*, the man of fiery zeal! It would be too much to recount his entire history, to those who know it not. Those who know it will remember his unsuccessful work among his people, which did not forsake Baal, and upon the king, who sold himself to Jezebel; and that when he lay under the Juniper, with almost exhausted patience, and cried—It is enough, Lord, take my life (1 Kings xix. 4), the Lord strengthened him to go on his way, and not forget mercy in his zeal.

Think further of Isaiah, that prince and Evangelist among the prophets, whose words are so abundantly given to us. His first appointment told him (ch. vi.) that the hardened people would not hear and understand him; and how did he, through a long prophetic life under four kings, speak words to them of fear and consolation, which we are now beginning first to understand! When he predicts the future Servant of God, and the reproach and sufferings of Christ—did he not (like David) typically experience in himself what he could therefore speak as also a servant of God? Did he not himself complain as the servant of God—"Then I said, I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work is my God's?" (Isa xlix. 4). And so also as the type of Christ he declared his own experience —"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God helpeth me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, for I know that I shall not be ashamed" (ch. l. 6, 7).

But among all the prophets whose lives and sufferings are recorded in Scripture, *Jeremiah* is the most marked, whose whole life was as it were a Lamentation, and whose history, interwoven with his words, has ever been a mirror of consolation to the preacher of righteousness. He bore the sin of his people upon his heart and in his heart. "I sat not"—so he says (according to the right translation)—"in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone before Thy hand; for thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? Thou hast become to me as waters

that flow no more" (ch. xv. 17, 18). So he complains to the Lord; but the Lord heals him, and His mercies flow; yet He gives him no rest, for he must continue his testimony in scorn and persecution. We hear him saying—"O Lord, Thou hast persuaded me, and I was persuaded: Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed; but I am in derision daily, and every one mocketh me. For since I cried out concerning the violence and spoil, the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily. Then I thought, I will not make mention of Him, nor *speak any more in His name.* But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and could not stay. For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report against him! yea, we will report against him! Said all my familiars, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge upon him" (ch. xx. 7–10). More than once Jeremiah is imprisoned, and cast into the pit. The book of his sayings, which was read before king Jehoiakim, during the prophet's imprisonment, was in the king's wrath torn and burnt; but it is written again, and the fulfilment of the threatened judgment comes. He there forbids the residue of Judah to go down to Egypt—and of what avail is his word? They carry himself bound with them into Egypt, and boldly say:—"As for the word that thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the Melecheth of heaven!" (ch. xliv. 16, 17).

Let this suffice for the answer of the question—Are there not examples of suffering and patience among the prophets? Thou that complainest of a little contradiction of sinners, and canst not sustain thy soul under it—compare thyself with these men of God! Art thou greater than they? Is thy lot worse than theirs? Dost thou expect to be spared, when all the servants of God have been required thus to suffer? Or dost thou think that thou will be able by prudence to escape persecution? Behold how impossible that is. Behold the whole series of prophets as one example before thine eyes; yea, add to them, what St James would not add, *the Apostles* of Jesus Christ, and among them St Paul, to whom it was appointed of the

Lord—I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name (Acts ix. 16). And wouldst thou seek in any other way to serve the Lord in comfort, to obtain salvation without endurance?

Behold, we count them happy which endure! Thus St James goes back to the beginning of his Epistle—Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life. But not until he *hath* endured his trial! O how infinitely better is this *Blessed*, than the Woe upon those who *have* nourished their hearts! We already count the pious blessed who hold out; and not inappropriately, for the true word of God gives us that direction: how will heaven count them blessed, and the faithful Lord make them so! We poor sinners in our natural sympathy are glad to say, when we can—Well for him, he has struggled through! What will the Lord, who is very pitiful and full of compassion, do to compensate superabundantly the afflictions with which He did not willingly afflict His children? (Lam. iii. 33). Let, then, our faith anticipate this consolation of hope in the midst of all our short afflictions! *We* can already count them happy that endure, and say so for their encouragement: but let us take care that the words of Job's wife may never apply to us—"Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands; thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled!" (Job iv. 3–5). That *may not* apply to us, did I say? Alas, I must retract the word; for more or less they apply to us *all.* This is our infirmity; and yet with this our faintness *patience* may very well consist—that patience which the Lord requires, and approves in us. Behold, that same *Job*, who fainted and murmured, is here once more in Holy Scripture, long after the time of his endurance, counted happy and blessed.

Ye have heard of *the patience of Job:* thus speaks St James further in the name of the Lord; giving the man in the land of Uz the honour of naming him alone after all the prophets! He solemnly confirms the proverbial saying among the Israelites, according to which the apocryphal writer, after recording the trial of Tobias, adds—"This tribulation God sent to him, that those who came after him might have an example of patience,

even as the holy Job" (Tob. ii. 12). But still more valid and decisive is the praise of Job in the *holy* Scripture, where the Lord Himself says by Ezekiel, that even the three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, should in a sinful land save only their own souls by their righteousness (Ezek. xiv. 14). We learn there, as we learn here from St James, that the man Job actually lived like Noah, Daniel, and all the prophets; that the narrative of his life is not an instructive poem, but a real history. At that time most people had only *heard* of him; for reading was confined to the learned, and even they had not always all the books of Scripture. Have *we* rightly read the book of Job? Alas, Luther's translation of this obscure and difficult book is very imperfect; the corrected translation will alone exhibit the proper book of Job!

But, it may be said, was Job actually an example of suffering affliction and of *patience?* His name is indeed proverbial for bitter and fearful *suffering;* and his sufferings were not, like those of the prophets, endured in the name and for the sake of the Lord, but for his own purification and confirmation in godliness—on account of the Accuser, who demanded from the Lord this power over him. This is one cause why St James adds his name to the prophets, that he may point to such peculiar Job-sufferings. But, did Job stand in the trial? Often is he quoted as a warning example of murmuring and impatience. Assuredly, though he did not at the first, yet he soon did, sin with his lips; we find in his words the strongest outbursts of human agony, and bold words of self-justification before his God; yea, he cursed the day of his birth, as Jeremiah also did. *But* throughout all he remained *sincere*, according to that measure of grace which alone he could receive in his day; his weakness, however, was stronger and better than the uncharitable and falsely-wise judging of his friends. We learn here, also, that no human example of patience is perfectly pure before the Lord, and that the merciful judgment of the Lord is not, therefore, restricted. It is wrong that we should dwell more on Job's murmuring than upon his patience; for the Lord forgave the infirmity, washed away the sin, and in the end uttered His judgment upon the others—Ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath done! Go to My servant Job, and he shall pray for you! (ch. xlii. 7, 8).

Therefore let us rather keep in remembrance that first word, which has been the comfort of thousands upon thousands—The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: Blessed be the name of the Lord (ch. i. 21); and that last word—Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes! (ch. xlii. 6). Let us, as is most fit, not look at the troubled course of the middle of his conflict, but at the victory which the mercy of the Lord gave him, to the *end* of that patience which the Supreme acknowledged!

It is *that* which St James means in the following word—And have seen the end of the Lord; that is, the end which *the Lord* put to the sufferings of Job, so gloriously and superabundantly recompensing him. On a hasty glance, we might understand the words otherwise, as if St James would go on to speak, after Job, of the issue of the sufferings of *the Lord*, that is, of Jesus Christ. It might be wondered at that he leaves unmentioned the only perfect example of patience, nor ever expressly points to Him who was the Beginner and Finisher of the faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross and despised the shame (Heb. xii. 2). The *patience* of this Supreme Endurer, this Just One who was condemned and resisted not (ver. 6), had not been actually *seen* by all the readers of this Epistle, who lived in the Dispersion, above five and twenty years after the crucifixion; consequently, the distinction between this and the ancient history of Job, which is said to have been only *heard of*, falls down to the ground. Moreover, it would not be appropriate to speak of the death of Christ as His *end*. St James speaks of Him as the Lord of glory (ch. ii. 1)—as the Judge standing before the door! And can he mean Him, when he says—The end of *the Lord;* just as he said before—The prophets who spoke in the name *of the Lord?* And the conclusion is against this meaning of the word—For the Lord is very pitiful, and of great compassion. We see, therefore, that St James is limiting himself, for the sake of his Israelitish readers, to examples taken from the ancient *Scripture*, among which that of Job naturally takes the highest place. He says, "Ye have *seen* the end *of the Lord*"—not of Job—in order to strengthen the previous "heard;" and further, to say that such histories, though only heard, are as it were livingly presented before our eyes in their reality for all ages.

Job's affliction was upon earth turned into joy, in perfect conformity with the degree of his faith, and the plans of God, in that period. The Lord turned the captivity of Job, and gave him twice as much as he had had before. This is an Old-Testament *type* of the eternal compensation reserved for *us* Christians, who, in richer light and greater grace, look forward to another world. Suffering and dying Christians sometimes receive from that world a gleam of glory as to the earthly end of their patience, so that it may be said of them—Consider the end of their conversation and follow their faith! (Heb. xiii. 7). Who does not count the death of Stephen glorious? But where this is not to be *seen*, we should yet confidently hope for the precious fruit of the tearful sowing. We should strengthen that hope by all that we have seen of Job-histories upon earth; and hold fast the blessed conclusion which St James by the Spirit adds.

For the Lord is very pitiful, full of compassion, and *of tender mercy!* This conclusion first gives us the full and profound solution of the meaning of our text. Because the Lord is very pitiful, He sent help at the right time to the hardly-beset Job; and with the temptation opened a *way of escape*, that he might be able to bear it (1 Cor. x. 13). Therefore He entered Himself upon the scene, and put an end to all the folly of the men who surrounded Job, which only made the evil worse by vexing the soul of the just man; therefore did He by His own gracious interposition prepare for the words of Job a far better end than that of ch. xxxi. 40—"The words of Job are ended." Therefore did He look into his heart, instead of severely visiting upon him "the speeches of a desperate man into the wind" (ch. vi. 26); therefore did He hold valid Job's *patience*, and, in order to this, bring in at the right time the end of all his suffering. But thus does the Lord deal with us all, according to our ability and the measure of grace received. Thus, Job's most instructive example should teach us ever to look up from the enduring man to the merciful God; we should learn that the patience of no man is perfect in itself, or of any merit; that all who have endured would have been put to shame if the Lord had pushed the test further; that this, however, is not His pleasure, but that His mercy brings in the good end, and utters the pitiful judgment.

Here we cannot but think of Him, whom St James indeed does not name, meaning probably that his very silence should suggest to their minds what to all Christians was self-understood. We look up to our merciful and sympathising High Priest, who Himself was in His infirmity suffering and tempted, who ever imparts to us in our sufferings the light, and power, and consolation of His grace, that we may suffer with Himself. He who holds fast this great truth in faith, may count himself blessed in his faith, even before the glorious end. Ye sufferers, take to your hearts this consolation! and ye who are for the present spared, learn better and more mercifully to comfort the afflicted than the friends of Job! But arm yourselves with these good examples, that you may not be faint and easily terrified, when your troubles come.

XXIX.

SWEAR NOT; PURIFY YOUR SPEECH.

(Ch. v. 12.)

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

In writing letters, we naturally, when reaching the end, bethink ourselves of anything necessary, or that might be useful, which must be added: so St Paul does in his Epistles; and the twelfth verse of this last chapter seems to be an example in St James of the same thing. For how else could he have here lighted on the forbidden *swearing*, so singularly inserting this warning between the examples of *patience* and the power of *prayer?* The denunciation of the sins of the tongue had been a prominent subject in the earlier part of the Epistle: but he could not individually particularise all that the untamed tongue is too swift to speak. Nor could that have been his design; but one thing occurs to him now which he would not leave unmentioned, and therefore supplements here. But why here? We may thus exhibit the connection of his thoughts: Job's

history, which he had just livingly set before them, reminds him of Job's sins with his tongue, of his glorying, his murmuring, his contention with God, the cursing of his day. He might have continued—Murmur not, my brethren! But he will not say this to the dishonour of Job; for, the final judgment of the Pitiful One had mercifully overlooked the impatience of Job, and even approved and sealed the glory of his patience. But St James takes occasion lightly to *remind* them, in this place, of that which the Lord had made very prominent in the Sermon on the Mount—so constantly referred to throughout this Epistle—to wit, of the inconsiderate swearing, with all kinds of imitations of the sacred oath, which was so deeply rooted in the Jewish custom. This is a matter which he feels bound to enforce upon his brethren, and he does so almost in the same words as those of the Sermon on the Mount: "Once more to speak, in connection with Job, of the restraint of the tongue—brethren, *before all other things* which I have written *on this subject*, forget not our Lord's rigid and absolute word against swearing!" Thus we see how naturally, both for the writer and the then readers of this Epistle, this verse occurs in this place. But it is *to us* also an important repetition of a word of our Lord, which we always need rightly to *hear;* that is, first to understand it aright, and then to honour it by earnest obedience.

This passage has two topics in it: the specific warning against swearing; and the general exhortation to pure, simple, and consistent words in discourse, free from all superfluity.

Swear not! How is this to be rightly understood? Are we to avoid, with the Mennonites and Quakers, every kind of oath? St James *seems* indeed to strengthen even the word of Jesus against them, when he says—Nor with *any other oath!* No, my brethren, neither our Lord there nor His servant here speaks unconditionally against that true and holy oath by God, which the law not abolished by grace commands, which is unavoidable on account of evil, and which is justified by most decisive examples throughout the whole of the Scriptures. Neither Jesus nor James *could* say—what therefore is *not* said—Ye shall swear neither by God Himself nor by any creature! For how could He, who came not to abolish the law, directly contradict that law? But the law, in that most important pas-

sage concerning the worship of God alone, with which Jesus confronted Satan, says expressly—Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve Him, and *swear by His name* (Deut. vi. 13). The commandment from Sinai forbids us not to take the name of God into our lips holily and usefully; every right utterance of His name is a confession of the heart's allegiance to the true God. And what is the oath, in its right place, other than a confession and testimony that we think of God *adoringly*, and therefore and therein speak the truth? Concerning the wicked neighbours of Israel we read the Lord's word by the prophets —"And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the way of My people, to swear by My name, The Lord liveth; as they taught My people to swear by Baal; then shall they build in the midst of My people" (Jer. xii. 16). The Lord Himself predicts a swearing which cannot be sin, when it is said—"They shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of Israel out of all the countries whither they had been driven!" (Jer. xxiii. 7, 8). Yea, Isaiah prophesies of the millennial kingdom —"That he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth (properly, the God *Amen*); and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth, the God *Amen*" (Is. xv. 16).

The first word with which Elijah, the man of God, emerged from his obscurity, was a solemn sacred oath—As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years! (1 Kings xvii. 1). Against the false prophets Micaiah affirmed—As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak! (1 Kings xxii. 14). So the Prophets oftentimes swear; and thus we find in the Epistles of the Apostles the confirming oath; and so in the Revelation of St John (ch. x. 6) an angel swears by Him that liveth for ever and ever! And why speak we of Prophets, Apostles, and Angels? God Himself, in accommodating condescension to weak man, sweareth by His own name; and twenty-three times in the Old Testament we hear the solemn "*As I live*, saith the Lord!" In reality, it is only the same when, in the New Testament, the Son, the Word of God to the world, the Faithful Witness, in whose mouth every word is true because He speaks

it, nevertheless sweareth by Himself—*As I speak to you!* For that is the meaning of His "*Verily, Verily*, or, *Amen, Amen, I say unto you.*

Hence we understand that the oath in itself cannot possibly be sin, as the Apostle says—Men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them the end of all strife (Heb. vi. 16). Before a tribunal, to obviate strife without end, and to ascertain the truth before the face of God, an oath is lawful and right. Thus Christ, in submission to the ordinance of God, and in the service of the world, took a judicial oath before the authorities. For it was the custom in Israel that the judge should speak as the high priest did—*I adjure thee by the living God:* the answer was valid as the acceptance and taking of the required oath. We also may unsinfully swear when we are adjured before a judgment-seat; that is not only no sin, it is our bounden duty to God and man. It is an obedient testimony that we stand in judgment as in the presence of God, whose name we invoke and reverence; and it is a service of love to our neighbour, to do the right. True, this swearing in the present world *cometh of evil!* But we must with Christ be subject to the law, in love, for the sake of the evil.

All this being established, *what kind* of swearing is it of which the Lord and His servant speak—Ye shall not swear at all! We are accustomed to teach our children in the Catechism that swearing is permitted before a tribunal, forbidden in common life. Yet this does not hit the point, and such a doctrine is false. Are then the oaths, which occur in Scripture, of Prophets, Apostles, and other holy men, simply judicial oaths? As before the tribunal men may require and may take solemn oaths for very trifling matters, so even in "common life" it may sometimes be very seasonably said with solemnity—*True as the Lord liveth!* calling Him to witness. Against such a word St James does not protest, any more than against that which he prescribes—*If the Lord will!* It is a very perverse exposition to say that St James speaks altogether of the judicial oath of the oppressed before the judgment-seat; for men do not swear before the judgment-seat by heaven or by earth. Nor does St James mean—*Rather go not to law!* for that is quite a different matter, and the advice would not have been expressed by *Swear not!* It is self-understood that for a brother to go to

law with a brother is a great evil. It is unimaginable that a case should occur in which both parties, between whom an oath has become necessary, are true Christians and act as such; where there must be swearing, sin must exist on account of which it becomes necessary. The Christian submits to the sad necessity when it becomes his duty to assert important right; in matters of less moment he would rather recede, and not swear; scarcely even in the extremest need would he be a party to the requirement of an oath, lest he should lead his neighbour into temptation. Thus even before the judgment the warning holds good—Swear not! But even in ordinary life the Spirit of the Lord may urge us to affirm a matter with sacred solemnity in the name of the Lord. On the other hand, and because the oath is so sacred, there is a prohibition of *all presumptuous, trifling, useless imitation and desecration of the oath.* The only true oath is the oath by God; and that is lawful and right only as far as we most humbly place ourselves under the authority of God; every other kind of swearing is no more than blasphemous presumption. The most perfect formula of swearing is that of 2 Cor. i. 23—I call God to witness on my soul! Obviously, that involves the idea of punishment for untruth; but if we as it were ourselves dictate the punishment, or place our own salvation in pledge, or denounce upon ourselves damnation if we lie—then we invade the prerogative of God, who alone can save and condemn, whether the oath be true or perjured. It were much to be wished that our formula "So help me God" could be changed for one more appropriate; for it is open to misunderstanding, as if without He would not help. The phrase in the Old Testament—"The Lord do thus or thus unto me"—was conceded to infirmity; it is not for us to imitate it.

Generally, we already find in the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament the evident transition from sacred swearing to the Jewish custom, which irreverently and thoughtlessly used it. Much too often and too quickly say the people—As the Lord liveth! whence naturally springs much sinful desecration of the phrase. Let us once more think of Job! How presumptuously and sinfully did he swear, when he cried in heat—"As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul;—my lips shall not speak wickedness!

Till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me! My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live!" (Job xxvii. 2–6). When David had taken Saul's spear and cruse of water, and cried half in mockery to Abner—As the Lord liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master! (1 Sam. xxvi. 16)—he certainly should have left the swearing out. When he sealed the doom, in his own mind, of the guilty man of Nathan's story—As the Lord liveth, the man is a son of death! while he was himself the man (2 Sam. xii. 5, 7)—he certainly was not in the right state to swear, but sealed his own doom, and must have died, if the Lord had not had mercy. When Saul, on occasion of the sin in the matter of the honey, said—As the Lord liveth, if it were my son Jonathan, he should die! and once more—God do so to me and more also, thou shalt die the death! the people cried on their part—As the Lord liveth, not a hair of his head shall be touched! And thus there was oath against oath, as so frequently happens; and all this mischief sprang from the impetuous word of Saul—Cursed be he that eateth anything! (1 Sam. xiv. 24, 39, 44, 45). How fearful sounds this idle desecration of the name of God, when the same Saul, rejected of God, swore by the Lord to the witch—As the Lord liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee in this thing! (1 Sam. xxviii. 10). Scarcely different from this is Gehazi's oath, who had learned from his master holy language, which he profanely perverted—As the Lord liveth, I will run after Naaman, and take something of him! (2 Kings v. 29).

When afterwards the pharisaic Jews thought of the commandment—Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain! they did with it as with everything else; they adhered to the mere letter, and carefully avoided using the name of God in their oaths. But only the worse was their common custom: their vain swearing *by heaven*, *by earth*, by their own heads (as in the Old Testament, by the soul), by the Temple and its gold, the altar and its offerings, and so forth. It was this folly—which, moreover, made perverse distinctions—that the Lord condemned, showing them that swearing by anything out of God either had no meaning, or men thereby thought of God, in whose power all things are. The heaven is His throne; the earth His footstool; our heads and our lives

are no more in our power than the most insignificant hair! St James means no other here; and when he says in addition—*Nor by any other oath*, it means—Swear not with any *similar* oath, which, dealing with the name of God, presumes to take anything as a pledge of confirmation.

Do *we* need no longer all these warnings? Well we know that the ungodly in Christendom take profane oaths, like Saul and Gehazi. Well also we know that, like the Jews of former times, vain triflers substitute other things for the name of God, and think that this kind of swearing is only an innocent kind of speech. O that such swearing were not found among Christians, who would fain be the children of God! O that many of them were more zealous in unlearning the habit of thoughtlessly using, on the most trivial occasions, the formulas of sacred adjuration! What can be more blasphemously presumptuous than for poor sinful creatures to arrogate to themselves the supreme prerogative of the Most High, that of swearing by Himself, and to imitate the Divine Majesty by their *As I live!* But this is the real meaning of *By my soul!* It is no excuse that it is found in the Old Testament; for there the expression, often at least, occurs in a true and proper sense; as even the ungodly king Zedekiah uttered it to Jeremiah—As the Lord liveth, that made us this soul (Jer. xxxviii. 16); and as we find it in full sometimes—As the Lord liveth, and as my or thy soul liveth! Brethren, be on your guard against all such forms of customary speech as must be included in the "swearing" which is forbidden. Be not conformed to this world! Yield all your members to the service of God in righteousness, and your tongues to the pure service of truth!

Ye should *sanctify and keep pure your discourse generally;* cleanse it from all superfluity and aftergrowth of sin, of idle and useless conversation. This is the general ground on which rests the prohibition of vain swearing. *But let your word be yea, if it be yea; nay, if it be nay:* This is Luther's not incorrect paraphrase of what St James gives literally according to Christ's own saying—*But let your yea be yea, your nay, nay.* We know that the Lord Himself added—*Whatsoever is more than this cometh of evil.* But this does not at once mean that every word beyond a simple affirmative or negation is sin! Indeed, if there were no sin, no lie, no mistrust, in the world, the sim-

plest utterances would suffice. But *on account of evil* many words have become necessary for attestation of the truth. O how many words does the Spirit of God in Scripture use to testify and affirm to us what we will not believe, accept, and learn! Consequently, we also must, in our sacred office for the good of men, seek strength and emphasis of expression; our love must not be ashamed to confront evil with much more than plain yea and nay. On the day of Pentecost, St Peter testified and exhorted with *many* other words—Save yourselves from this untoward generation! (Acts ii. 40). St Paul in Troas continued his discourse till midnight, so that Eutychus fell into a deep sleep while he was long preaching (Acts xx. 7, 9). And what fulness of words out of a full heart and urgent zeal do we find sometimes in his Epistles! And so must preachers, teachers, and parents, not shrink from repeating their yea and nay with many words, when necessity requires.

But this is what St James would say, as he changes the word of Christ a little in his free spirit, though without changing its meaning:—Assuredly we should utter all in pure *truth*, and with fitting *earnestness* of truth; no absolutely *useless* word should proceed out of our mouth; never should we heap up words *on account of our own uncertainty*, or with *lying*, in order to affirm anything in a manner similar to swearing. *As far as in us lies*, our speech should be in the purest simplicity, as becometh the new nature, and those who live in an element of truth. And *this* point touches us more closely, brethren, than the previous denunciation of swearing! How much are we wanting in the sanctification of our discourse! St James' second word would open to us a sermon of itself; but we must briefly unfold it, and mark that our words should be *sincere*, *true*, *simple*, and *firm*. Four great attributes of the words which we speak!

Before all things our lips should utter Yea or Nay, when the yea or nay is in the *heart;* that is, we should *sincerely* speak as we mean. A Christian should never give up his glorying that he speaks the truth from his heart; it should never be needful to him to add strong affirmations *because on other occasions he speaks less than the truth:*—only on account of undeserved distrust does he humble himself, as if he might be thought to lie. St Paul affirms—I say the truth in Christ, I lie not (Rom.

ix. 1); he does not mean "This time I lie not," but that he always speaks the truth. Therefore our lips should utter Yea or Nay only when *the matter* is yea or nay; that is, our speech should be *true*, a testimony to be depended upon. If it is impossible always to attain this, because we may be mistaken, we should at least to the best of our ability be conscientious in our convictions. That which we do not certainly know, we should not so certainly testify; when we know not the yea or nay of the matter, we should qualify our utterance.

But the word of Christ and St James means still more—We should say Yea or Nay, where yea or nay is the fact, or at least in our heart's thought concerning it; that is, indeed, not merely these two words, yet without useless superfluity of words in addition. Consequently, *as much as in us lies*, if necessity do not constrain, we should use a *simple, short, striking* character of discourse. How much force and emphasis is thrown away among us in the many words which we heap up to supply the place of this! We all use too many words, without necessity and to our hurt. Simple words are forcible; the command or prohibition is more likely to be heard if expressed in decisive and firm words. How often does the father, still oftener the mother, among you complain—I have told my child many times over, but he will not hear! But it is your fault, because you are accustomed to speak many times over; learn to speak once with effect. The soldiers of the centurion at Capernaum went or came because they heard the plain word of command—Go! Come! Do this! (Matt. viii. 9). So accustom yourselves to speak firmly and decisively. And this leads, finally, to the last point—Abide by your yea or nay, when once it has been spoken; let your speech be *consistent and firm*, not vacillating—first yea, then nay, in word or deed. Not that we would approve of or recommend that firmness of selfishness which knows only—What I have said, I have said! If your first yea or nay was precipitate, and if it would be sin to hold to it, then no sinful oath ought to bind us; otherwise Herod would have been obliged to slay John the Baptist for his oath's sake. But the great point is to speak nothing but what may be maintained, with reservation of circumstances which are in the power of God alone. So St Paul excuses himself, that God's own hindrance prevented him from keeping his promise to the Corin-

thians: he had fully intended to keep it, and says—The things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea, yea, and nay, nay, at once? (2 Cor. i. 17).

Brethren, exercise yourselves diligently, through the Divine grace, in the sanctification of your words in the truth—*that ye fall not into hypocrisy!* So Luther read the text, and it gives a good sense—That ye do not, as the children of God, make yourselves partakers in the guilt of the hypocrisy, lying, insincerity, and falsity, from which in the world springs the multitude of unchecked words. But St James probably wrote—That ye may not fall into *condemnation;* that ye may not before God and man be responsible for unconsidered and idle words.

XXX.

PRAYING AND SINGING.

(Ch. v. 13.)

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

The beautiful and pregnant saying with which St James continues, speaks further of the right use of the *tongue;* yet he goes back at once to the *heart*, from the ground of which, as before men, so also before God, our speech should come in its sincerity and simplicity, *according to the spirit of our mind.* We say very properly that *praying* is the best and holiest use of our tongue; therefore St James opposes to its shameful misuse in vain swearing the sincere words of the heart. We are reminded of Luther's Catechism—that we should not "take the name of God without purpose, but call upon it in all our need, pray to it, worship it, and thank it." The whole clause gives us an answer to the question which might arise, why St James *attributes prayer only to those who are afflicted.* We observe, that he means especially the prayer of supplication, to which our word *petition* strictly corresponds. But the *singing of*

psalms is also prayer. It is even the loftiest, noblest prayer, in which we, needy and therefore selfish mortals, become like the angels, who have nothing to pray for on their own behalf, but praise God without intermission. Yea, should not and ought not every petition to pass over into thanksgiving, in its confident and joyful Amen? *Is any merry? let him sing psalms:*—let him not think that he has nothing to say to God because nothing now oppresses him, and he lacks nothing—as if God was a God only for times of need!

Further, let us very carefully look at the words, that we may rightly understand them, and not too literally press their letter. We may be *afflicted* without any external or especial distress, only through trial and exercise of heart; but we ought to be merry, or of *good courage*, even in the midst of trial, and count it pure joy to go through the discipline which our patience willingly accepts—without praying against it, or even at first finding it needful to pray for consolation and strength. Finally, we should always *become* joyful and of merry heart before God, even if we are not yet so; we should always continue and end with praise and thanksgiving what began with supplication and petition. And why not in some sense begin with it? Again, if our merry spirit does not spring from faith, if our peace and joy of heart is not sound and pure before God, then there would be far more need to pray against temptation, to supplicate for the spiritual gifts in which we are wanting. We see that St James does not forbid our inverting the words: If any man suffer, let him teach and encourage himself by songs of praise and thankfulness, that he may strengthen or obtain a good courage in trial. Is any merry? let him be very careful to be sure that his joy is sound, and pray to be defended from sinful joy. For in joy and sorrow our heart and mouth should be always directed only to God; even the merry *singing* of the joyous should be a singing of psalms, that is, a praying. *This* is the proper meaning of this beautiful saying, and makes it very like another—Pray without ceasing! (1 Thess. v. 17).

But, inasmuch as the praying of the afflicted is more familiar to us, and more frequently urged, let us turn our consideration especially now to the following clause concerning the psalm-singing of the merry. *This* is really the main thing which St James intends; and he only presupposes the former, or lays it

as a foundation, in order to build upon it the word—But let not him who is not afflicted forget to speak to God in his heart. We shall hear further presently about the praying of the man in affliction; let us therefore dwell now only upon the text—*Is any merry? let him sing psalms.*

In the original this last is only a single word, which we cannot reproduce—Let him *psalm*, or *praise*, that is, his God. But, in order that we may thoroughly deal with this great saying, let us divide the word according to our translation, and ask first whether it might be said generally—Is any merry? let him *sing!* We answer, Assuredly; for the singing is necessarily included and recognised in the praise of psalms. That the joyful should sing, is as natural as that the afflicted should pray—rather, more natural. Song as the expression of cheerfulness is something universal in human nature; there were always, both in Israel and among all other nations, songs of joy. Hence it is constantly mentioned in the prophets, by whom joyous singing is used as a frequent figure, even as they threaten that God will take away the song of the bridegroom and the bride, and so forth. The *singing* of men is in itself good and noble. The same God who furnished the birds of heaven with the notes wherein they unconsciously praise their Creator, gave to man the power to sing. We all know how highly Luther, for example, estimated the gift and the art of song. Let him to whom it is granted, rejoice therein; let him who lacks it seek if possible to excite it, for it is a good gift of the Creator generally belonging to our human nature. Let our children learn to sing in the schools, even as they learn to read. Our fathers sang more in all the affairs of life than we do; our times are in this respect less fresh, and artless, and joyous. There are many among us who never sing except when adding their voices to the voice of the Church—and therefore they sing so badly there. Not that a harsh song from a good heart is unacceptable to God; but He should have our best. And as David in his day took care that there should be practised singers for the sanctuary, we also should make provision for the Church's service of song, that God may have in all respects a perfect offering. How gracious and lovely is the congregation, singing with the heart acceptable songs!

We will not, however, hasten on to this at once, but take one

sentence by its clauses. Is any merry? let him *sing*—but *what?* Ah, this gives us occasion to bring to mind much that is unprofitable! How miserably is noble music desecrated in the service of sin, so that the wood, or the metal, or the strings, might well mourn as creatures of God over their misuse! And how is glorious music perverted and desecrated upon the tongue of man, when it is prostituted to filthy songs? The dancing in old times around the golden calf was an abomination before God, and so is much that is like it among His people now. There are songs enough provided for the merry, which must be classed at least among those foolish jestings which in the saints so unworthily take the place of thanksgiving (Eph. v. 4). Of them Solomon's word holds good—It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man even *to hear* the song of fools (Eccles. vii. 5). And there are impure and shameful songs heard in our streets, by which a wicked spirit, roaring out of the inflamed throats of the debauched, pollutes even the days of the Lord in Christian communities! How ought such singers to be abashed and confounded, when they attempt to open the same lips in sacred songs before God! Christians, be on your guard continually against them, and take care to check in your children the faintest complacency in them. Further, there are so-called decent and reputable songs which express worldly joy in, it may be, a very refined manner, though they are altogether impure, unspiritual, contrary to God, and without Christ: they either altogether forget the Lord, or misuse His holy name; they spring from the lust of the flesh, from carnal and creaturely merriment; that is all that they can express, and to that they cannot fail more or less to allure. But all the joy of a Christian should be sanctified in God; natural joy is ever a dangerous thing, since the evil nature is so apt to mingle with it. Therefore, as we sanctify suffering by prayer, and banish the sadness of the heart by seeking the true consolation, so should we also—means St James—retain and sanctify the merry spirit by holy song *before God.* All our joy should be with praise and thanksgiving in His presence.

How so then? Should we have in our lips only songs which expressly utter praise and thanksgiving *to God?* Certainly not, dear brethren; and he who should wish this injunction to be fulfilled in such pharisaic literality would do great injustice to

its free and gracious meaning. There are good and pure songs for merry souls which are not directly spiritual, as we use the term; there is a permitted singing together of the people of God, which may be a human participation in the human, and not without unexpressed witness to God, who fills our hearts with food and gladness (Acts xiv. 17). There are songs to nature, national and patriotic songs, which are pure to the pure, though they are not strictly psalms of Israel. When the Lord in His sublime parable mentions the music and dancing of the whole house on an occasion of great joy (Luke xv. 25), He found nothing therein of itself criminal. He who requires us to become like little children, will take no offence at the joyful songs of childlike men. We would not even reject the words of the son of Sirach, when rightly understood, though they are not sufficiently guarded:—"A concert of music in a banquet of wine is as a signet of carbuncle set in gold. As a signet of an emerald set in a work of gold, so is the melody of music with pleasant wine" (Ecclus. xxxii. 5, 6). We would not fanatically allow nothing but psalms to be sung; but a legitimate piety requires that we be able freely and cordially to connect the unmentioned name of God with every song, and thus make of it a psalm.

And so it follows that we, dear brethren, should indeed, when joyous, find the best and most natural expression of our joy in *psalms*. But we must ask what these strictly mean. First of all, this sanctified word reminds us of those psalms and songs of praise which the Spirit of God expressly put into the mouths of His people, wherewith to praise the Lord their God. The song of Moses at the Red Sea is not lost even in the future glory (Rev. xv. 3). We hear in that, "The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation" (Ex. xv. 2),—and Isaiah prophesies that it should be heard again from the redeemed, "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, He also is become my salvation!" (Is. xii. 2). And how can we sufficiently honour by our diligent use the pre-eminently so-called *psalms of Israel*, in which the son of Jesse is so full of grace because the Spirit of the Lord spake by him, and His word was in his tongue (2 Sam. xxiii. 1, 2), with all the other prophetic hymns which the same Spirit added to them? O how lovely was the sound of those psalms in the Temple, in the way

of the pilgrimages, and in the household life of the priestly people! Our Saviour Himself sanctified at the last Passover the singing of those psalms; and we His disciples should never fail to have recourse to the inexhaustible treasure of that book of prayer and praise. These hymns were all in common called *psalms*, that is, songs of praise, although there is in them much supplication, and mourning, and petition; but the very singing of a song of lamentation before the Lord inspires joy into the soul, while it is to the praise of His name. The old custom of issuing the Psalter with the New Testament and our hymn-books, was very significant; teaching us, as the spiritual Israel, never to forget the psalms of Israel. The Reformed Churches in some cases pressed this too far, suffering no others to be sung in the churches—though, alas, these rhymed translations were too often full of human errors!—Finally, the devout reading of a psalm, when the inner man utters it earnestly before God, may itself be called a singing and making melody in the heart.

But as the *singing* which the text means does not refer only to the lips, so the *psalms* do not refer to those alone which are found in Scripture; for St James, *reminding* us of those, would rather that our heart should compose and sing new psalms also. The same Spirit of God has not ceased to put new songs into the mouths of men to this day. In the apostolical churches He gave birth to many new spiritual songs in addition to the ancient psalms, so that many who prophesied in the assembly had psalms to bring (1 Cor. xiv. 26). We still possess many ecclesiastical songs of the first ages. And our German people has been richer than all others, since the Reformation, in its precious treasure of hymns; wherein every heart may find expression for every sentiment that may be uttered before God. Our festival-hymns have almost become one with our festivals; in our old confession-hymns there is a might of testimony which was of wonderful influence at the beginning of the Reformation, and which has not yet lost its force; and our beautiful hymns of penitence and prayer have been always stamped with the blessing of God. Alas, that there should not be wanting examples of the perversion and corruption of our hymnology in our modern churches!

But of this nothing more now; let the earnest question of all be—Do we in such manner *sing*, that even our song may

also be a *prayer* before God? The Apostle, speaking against unintelligible words, says, "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray *with the understanding* (intelligibly to the church); I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also' (1 Cor. xiv. 15);—but we may very properly invert the words, and ask—Do you always sing *in the spirit*, and with the heart, and from the ground of the soul? Or even, to say the least, with *devotion*, understanding and reflecting upon the words which are upon your lips; so that you may, according to the Apostle's expression, *teach and exhort yourselves* in spiritual songs? Alas, there is, even in our evangelical worship, too much of mere vain lip-service, which takes the place of the worship which should be in spirit and in truth! Alas, there is too large a proportion of the congregation which has no taste for spiritual song—in itself a painful token that true devotion cannot penetrate and seize the entire man! Otherwise, the first hymn would not be regarded as sung merely while the congregation is coming in, and the concluding verses as merely singing them out. The one would be regarded as helping to fit preparation for the word of God, and the other would confirm and as it were seal the sermon. All would feel anxious to add their tribute to the voice of the congregation, singing as the voice of one man to God. All would seek what their souls need in hymns, as a channel of prayer. May the Lord's Spirit amend what is wrong, and restore us our ancient heartiness in the Church's service of song!

Into our houses, also, psalms and hymns should be introduced, for they do not necessarily belong to the walls of our churches. Be not contented, brethren, with simply reading, and nothing more than reading, your hymn-books at home. It is not only a lovely thing, but full of influence and blessing, for the members of the family to join, when they can do so, in the morning and evening song. And, further, the individual Christian may well sing alone before his God: when he is full of joy, wishing that he had a thousand tongues for a thousand psalms prompted by his heart, as also when he is striving to encourage his spirit to be of good cheer. Far be it from us to sink into that despondency and weakness of faith in which the captives of Zion hanged their harps on the willows of Babylon, and would not sing the Lord's songs in a strange land (Ps.

cxxxvii. 2–4). But the three men in the burning fiery furnace sang! Paul and Silas, in their imprisonment, with their feet fast in the stocks, first *prayed* and then *sang praise* to God, so that their fellow-prisoners could hear them! (Acts xvi. 25). So do thou pray, O sufferer, and thou shalt soon praise thy God! How many have sung away their cares and sorrows by the well-known strains of our own hymn-book, so diversified in their adaptation to all our wants!

But, in order to this, we must most sincerely and earnestly exercise ourselves in *prayerful singing*. We must in our trouble learn aright how to pray, that then in our cheerfulness —and, indeed, that we may become of good cheer—we may be able to sing the right psalms in the right spirit. This is the most internal and final meaning of the text: in all things, and without intermission, to turn the heart, and, where it may be, the lips also, to God; so that our heart at least may be as it were a harp, on which the strains of lamentation or songs of joy may evermore resound before the Lord. All naturally and in sincerity, according to the hand and dispensation of Providence, through the hours of good or evil; yet so that the joyful spirit may be ever more and more apt to return to psalms of thanksgiving and praise—until the day shall come when nought will remain but eternal gratitude and adoration in the psalm of salvation!

XXXI.

ORDINANCE FOR THE SICK.

(Ch. v. 14–18.)

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed a prayer that it might not rain: and it rained not in the land by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

St James has exhorted us to *prayer* in joy and sorrow, in need and prosperity; and to thankful praise in happy times, as well as to earnest supplication in times of trial: thus he has returned again to the subject of the commencement of the Epistle. There he began with the great promise, that God would assuredly give with simplicity to every petitioner; but added the necessary admonition, that he must ask in faith, nothing doubting! But there the subject was spiritual gifts for the need of the soul:—if any man lacked wisdom, or the consolation of patience, the power of obedience, the joy of faith and hope in tribulation. And many of his readers mistake St James—though, for the most part, wilfully, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the experience of believers—as if he allowed validity only to prayer for spiritual good. Is any man among you *afflicted?* let him *pray!* he has just been saying. And, if this is an external affliction, must he merely pray for consolation and a resigned will,—not for deliverance from the evil of his evil days and hours? Often, indeed, the best and truest prayer would ask only power to bear the tribulation; but then our infirmity seldom reaches this point, and, moreover, we have the free filial right to our Father's help from trouble. Certainly, there are many external tribulations which are not to remain any longer than the sin remains; and certainly it is the

will of God sometimes to reward our faith by external deliverances and answers to prayer, coming to the aid of our weakness, to the glory of His own name. That no one, therefore, may misunderstand his Epistle, or find it unintelligible upon this point, St James takes care before he closes to *exhort with promise to prayer for bodily and earthly help.* Of this, various kinds might have been mentioned: If any man lack bread or clothing—if a child of God be naked and destitute of daily food (ch. ii. 15)—if he be suffering pressing want as to any good pertaining to earthly life—in all cases of his care he must make his requests known unto God. But, for the sake of brevity, St James selects from them all, and makes prominent, the most obvious case of bodily distress, when he goes on—Is any *sick* among you? The ordinance for the sick which follows is very remarkable, and to be understood only according to the spirit of the whole context.

Thus much we observe on a preliminary glance: St James recommends, under some circumstances, intercession for the sick on the part of the representatives of the Church;—but the great point was always to be the forgiveness of sins, and spiritual healing;—he then finally confirms the power of prayer, both in heaven and upon earth, in its influence upon the body and life of an individual man, by an eminent example taken from Scripture.

Under some circumstances, we said, St James commends intercession even for the bodily cure of a sick man; and that not merely the intercession of friends or brethren as such, but in the name of the whole community, one of whose members is suffering. Is any sick among you? let him call *the elders* of *the church!* It is obvious, however, that this cannot be meant as a universal rule or command in every case of sickness in a member of the church. If so, we should require in most communities, where generally more than one single sick man is always to be found, many elders set apart to this express function. In the word of St James we must supply much that is not stated, but presupposed. Thus, for example: *Let him call the physician,* "whom the Lord created, and whose healing cometh from the Most High" (Ecclus. xxxviii. 1, 2). Further, the still better counsel must be understood—Is any sick? let him *submit himself* to the dispensation of Providence! For St

James cannot be supposed to mean that every sick man is to look beyond everything for recovery to health. Finally, *let him pray himself*—as was said before to the afflicted man. For what would be the intercession of others without his own prayer? But the physician does not save of himself, only the Lord by means of him; submission in suffering is not so easy a matter, and is not required in any such sense as that further help may not be sought; one's own prayer, finally, may, in the time of bodily weakness which oppresses the spirit, be weak and insufficient. St James refers here to *such* cases; for he does not use the word which in the original commonly expresses the being sick, but—Is any man *weak?* that is, weak in body, oppressed through the body with weakness of soul, so that he must look about him for comfort and invigoration, and feels his deep need of help from without. Then his sickness must become a *matter of the church*, through its representatives summoned. Yes, indeed, it is the duty of these elders to care for the sick as well as the poor; they should also *visit*, even though not called, the sick in their affliction. But should that not be the case, and the sickness be unknown to the elders, St James gives the member of the church a *right* expressly to *send for* those who should visit him. And *whom* does he thus mention? Not simply *the* elder, who labours in the word and doctrine, the pastor and teacher, the presiding elder or bishop. The apostolical churches knew nothing of the unnatural custom of our days, to remit every official work to one man, and impose every official burden in the community to one functionary. We ministers, if we are wise, shall not desire this, to be always and alone summoned to all houses, to administer comfort and offer prayer in all bodily and spiritual troubles; for more would be then exacted than we could accomplish (Ecclus. iii. 22). The first whom a sick man should call would naturally be one familiar to him in ordinary life, a friend and brother whose sympathy would be intimate and sure. St James surely could not preclude that, and absolutely insist upon official visitation instead of it. But, if the sick man has to say like him in the Gospel—I have no man to put me into the pool of grace provided for me—or if he should laudably feel more confidence in the ministers who are appointed by the church in the Lord's name—then he may and should call the *elders:* this is the counsel,

commandment, or permission, according to circumstances. For this purpose they are appointed; and every man who seeks grace or consolation through the Church should be able to rely upon them. But, once more, when *the elders* are mentioned, we are not to understand that the whole presbytery are to be solemnly and formally assembled round the sick man; it means, according to common usage, one or any number of them.

What then are those called to do? *They may pray over him.* Obviously, in unison with the sick man himself, who called them for this purpose, who prays himself, and would have his weak prayers strengthened. This saying of St James gives no countenance to the superstition which sends for the minister to "pray over the sick," when these have scarce any consciousness left, and which expects something wonderful to be the result. The elders have a pre-eminent power in prayer, not so much because of their official character personally, as because they do what they do in the name of the *Lord* and of His *Church*. The very different custom of asking for the common intercession of the church in the public service, is very highly to be commended. *For what*, further, may and should the elders pray? Assuredly, in the first place, for bodily healing, as the connection implies; yet not unconditionally, and still less in all cases, or simply because the sick man himself desires it. As the Lord, with His Apostles, did not always and everywhere make the sick whole at once and collectively, so the Apostles themselves *could not* in many cases use their miraculous power for that purpose, even if they had desired. Of Epaphroditus St Paul says—He was sick unto death, but God had mercy upon him; and not on him only, but on me also, that I might not have trouble upon trouble (Phil. ii. 27). Trophimus he left at Miletum sick, without laying hands upon him that he might recover (2 Tim. iv. 20). To his beloved son Timothy he has only medical advice to give (1 Tim. v. 23). Yea, against his own thorn in the flesh he prays thrice to the Lord, and receives only the answer—My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness! (2 Cor. xii. 7–9). And *here* St James does not presuppose any proper *miraculous gift* among the elders, for he would then have spoken rather of the laying on of their hands; but he does presume upon a power of *prayer*,

as it is promised to the whole Church down to the present day.[1] That he thinks primarily of praying for health, is clear from the added clause—*and anoint him with oil.* Little will suffice to show the wilful folly with which the Romanists base their invention of "extreme unction" upon this passage: St James does not speak of a sacramental act of an ordained priest, when he mentions the elders collectively; nor does he prescribe anything necessary to be done, as we have seen; nor does he, finally, direct the anointing to serve as a preparation for death, but as a means rather of cure. We find the anointing with oil to have been an ancient usage in Israel, of beautiful significance: St James lets it remain, and by the name of the Lord sanctifies it in the Church. As wounds were mollified with ointment (Luke x. 34; Is. i. 6), so at the same time the anointing with oil is the consecrated symbol of the Holy Spirit's consolation and power in the soul. Hence this oil was itself a *sign* in connection with the intercession and help, like many other signs which, even in miraculous healings, are found as assistances and stimulants of faith, both for the sick and for those who help him. No other was, for example, the plaister of figs which Isaiah commanded to be applied to king Hezekiah (Is. xxxviii. 21). Thus the Lord Himself condescended sometimes to the weakness of the sick in the same way, as when He made clay with the spittle (Mark vii. 33, viii. 23; John ix. 6). Here, indeed, the elders take nothing of their own person; but they anoint *in the name of the Lord*, as the Apostles in the name of the Lord laid on their hands. On their first probationary mission, the Apostles, according to their weakness, used the anointing with oil, as Mark vi. 13 records; although there was no such command given to them when they were sent, nor, apart from this passage, is there any allusion to it elsewhere. We may even in the present day, when a childlike faith might demand a symbol or palpable sign, do the same, or something like it, with what would answer to oil in Palestine, but we may also leave it alone. We may, finally, take the word of our text in its most spiritual meaning; and interpret it as intimating that medicine and all kinds of external means may be united with the instrument of prayer.

[1] So that, according to Bengel's expression, we have here also the medical faculty *in the Church*, as in 1 Cor. vi. 2-5 the judicial. This is to us, indeed, a far-reaching and humbling word of faith!

And the prayer of faith will help the sick, St James promises: thus *the prayer*, and not the oil, or whatever else there might be; in every case it will *help*, save, serve for health, and help even when no bodily healing followed. *The Lord*, who alone can do this, and who hears prayer offered in His own name, will assuredly *raise up* the sick: thus does St James carefully word his expression, because he cannot unconditionally recommend the prayer which demands recovery, or unconditionally promise that it shall be heard. Here, again, there is a specific expression for what we translate the *sick:* prayer will avail for the invigoration of the *exhausted* and *miserable;* the Lord will *raise up* the plagued and downcast—if it so please Him, even to soundness of body, certainly to comfort of soul, and joy in tribulation. For this is the great matter—*If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven to him.* Here St James obviously passes over from the body to the soul; and teaches us what we asserted at the beginning—*The great concern is ever forgiveness of sins and spiritual restoration to health!*

Assuredly, in all sickness the sick man himself, and every one who would truly help and raise him up, should never overlook this great principle, and neglect it in concern for bodily cure. He whose bed the Lord shall make in his sickness, and whom the Lord will comfort, must before all things be ready to cry—Lord, be merciful to me: heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee! (Ps. xli. 3, 4). How far from this is the behaviour of too many so-called Christians in their sickness, how different the view they take of their affliction! It is not received as from the hand of God, which, however, is never absent in the government of the world; but the natural mind will hold to natural causes—"The evil weather has brought it upon me—I overlooked this or that—it is in my constitution." They do not turn to the Lord as a helper, who alone can bless all means that are used; but send for the physician, and, if he do not cure, for another. They do not humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, so as to hear the knocking of death and of judgment—but "I am not in such a dangerous state; the physician is skilful, and my nature is still strong; to think of dying and repentance would be weakness, and even damage my case!" Alas that our physicians so often strengthen this *unbelieving mind*, which knows and will know nothing about the *prayer of faith!* O

that the work and care of our physicians and pastors—those who care for the body, and those who care for the soul—were more in concert for the good of our sick! So should it be, since in the cause and purpose of every sickness from God, body and soul are alike concerned. Here, as always, it is the whole *man;* as some one has said,[1] body and soul are by no means connected like sword and sheath, so that each might be cared for alone and of itself, the sheath being handed over to the belt-maker to mend, and the blade to the sword-polisher to sharpen. God's Spirit teaches the true Christian to say in his sickness—"The Lord has visited and laid me low in body, but only for the sake of my soul; then I will try myself, and find out *why* and to *what end* this sickness now rests upon me from His hand." There are, indeed, many self-invoked sicknesses, caused not simply by errors in diet, but by *sins which have been committed;* with sometimes a direct connection between the sin and the sickness; sometimes without it, yet so that the sick man, if he examines himself carefully, will know whence and wherefore his affliction has come. There are judicial sicknesses inflicted on sinners; yet, not that every sickness is to be so regarded, for many come for the glory of God, that His works may be shown forth in the cure of body or soul (John xi. 4, ix. 3). Therefore St James, referring to the sins of the sick man which *caused* his sickness, can only say—*And if he have* committed sins; for the rest, every man has committed many sins. There are, further, sicknesses which preserve and save the soul, which the heavenly Physician sends as medicine: who would, knowing this, pray against the wholesome cup, either for himself or for others? All this the sick man *ought* to know, as it respects his own case, through thorough self-examination; but because this is sometimes harder than for a skilful physician to form an unbiassed judgment on his own case, *therefore* the brethren and friends, the elders called in, should co-operate to assist him in the knowledge of his state. But this can be only *when* the sick man does sincerely open his heart to them. They may find him disposed as was the paralytic, whose heart was concerned only about the forgiveness of his sins; or *they* will know, in their experience, whether or not this wholesome sickness is a crisis of the soul, is like many an evil in the body which the physician

[1] If I mistake not, De Valenti.

does not therefore at once remove. In every case, however, and always, even when their intercession enters into the sick man's longing to recover, they will make it their chief concern to assist the soul, in all their visitations of the sick. The sufferer may be *raised up* to consolation and spiritual power, from every sickness; but such a raising up comes only from the *Lord*. Again, the Lord uses to that end ministers and instruments, who anoint, console, and pray *in His name;* but the absolute condition of their raising up even the soul, is the *confession* of the afflicted.

Confess your sins one to another! We observe how naturally and necessarily this must follow for their perfect direction. But why does St James say, not merely—Let the sick man confess to the elders; but—*Confess one to another?* First, because the elder is not a specially consecrated confessor-priest, but a brother in Christ; consequently, he who confesses in his presence does no more than what generally brethren may and should do before one another. ⌜Every Christian ought to be able to be to another a priest who receives confession and ministers absolution.⌟ St James then extends the position, and *at the same time* lays down an absolutely universal rule for mutual confession of sins, about which alone a long sermon might be preached. ⌜Not only should the afflicted and tempted soul confess to the elder called in; but every one, when there is occasion for it, that is, when he has sinned against his brother, should *confess* his sins to his brother. How much more should he have heart and courage to do so in the presence of the elder, already marked out by the confidence of the church!⌟ ⌜Alas, that there should be many single pastors in great communities, through whose want of pastoral intercourse with the multitudes of their flock it has come to pass that the sick would more readily and sincerely open their minds to others than to them!⌟ ⌜But would that all the sick were ready, whether to the elder or to any other, to pour out the acknowledgment of their sins!⌟ ⌜*This* is the great matter in all brotherly and official visitation of the sick; without that the desired talking and praying has no ground to proceed upon, and often exerts no influence.⌟ Most vain is the late summons of the minister, when the best season for the care of the soul is past; most unhappy in evangelical communities is the superstition which attaches specific power or merit to the

visit of the clergy as an external work. But most deplorable is the perversion of the *Communion of the sick.* It is observable that St James, mentioning the anointing with oil, does not say anything about offering the sick man the consecrated bread and wine. In the first ages of the Church there can be found no trace of such an application of the Eucharist. By this we would not intimate that the subsequent and present custom is simply wrong and sinful. But assuredly *this* is wrong, that people who for many long years have never sought the Lord's table should finally only in the fear of death stretch out their hands to His body and blood, in mere anxiety about *their own* souls, and without any fellowship with the church in their hearts. There is danger of our making the Communion at sick-beds an evangelical "final unction;" and worse than that of the Romanists, as being a perversion of a sacrament really instituted by Christ. Finally, the individual partaking of the Eucharist, without any fellowship in breaking and distribution, is somewhat opposed to the spirit of the institution; and we ought at least to be careful that the members of the family or other friends should be present on every such occasion.

But let us return to our text. Confess your sins one to another, and *pray for one another, that ye may be whole.* Thus St James imposes, not only the receiving of confession, but also the intercession, upon every member of the church in common with the elders, upon every brother for his brother. But when, in connection with the *confession of sin,* he speaks quite generally of *being healed,* we plainly see that he refers pre-eminently to spiritual health, to the cure of the soul—"that ye may be at all events healed of your sins!" To the healing of the body, also, the prayer of faith will avail only when to that very end it is a *prayer of faith;* that is, not only the prayer of a believer, but offered in faith, in that confidence of the attainment of the present object which can alone make the supplication for bodily help possible to be granted. Often in our own hearts we must think—I cannot here pray for bodily cure; or the Lord prevents it by His Spirit—Thou shalt not! But in other cases, and those not a few, the obstacle is in our own weakness of faith; and with reference to *this,* St James encouragingly adds—*The prayer of the righteous man availeth much, if it is earnest.* He who thus *mightily* and *effectually* would summon the other helps of

God, must obviously be himself a righteous man in his faith before God; and then must be able to take with him, for this special case, the whole might of his trust in the power of God. Such a prayer is not a begging and whimpering extorted by the flesh, nor is it a thoughtless demand on the ground of a promise lightly understood; this *effectual prayer of a righteous man* is an exceedingly great and unfrequent thing. But it availeth even *for external requests:* if not for *all*—for the Lord might *here* withstand the mightiest faith, according to His counsel, as He did the Apostle's cry for deliverance from his thorn—yet it availeth *much*, very much more than our weak faith generally conceives or hopes.

This *power of prayer* St James finally confirms by a great *example from Holy Scripture.* He was himself called "the Just," and celebrated as mighty in prayer; but he naturally abstains from referring to any experiences of his own, preferring now, at the close of his Epistle, to resort once more to the treasures of the Scripture history, from which he had already derived examples of suffering and patience. After the manner of the Old Testament, and for the encouragement of our weakness, the ancient Scriptures present very many examples of the hearing of prayer in external things. How many might St James have mentioned! He now selects the great *Elijah;* but he wisely adds a single word which holds good of all the typical and illustrious saints of old. We must not say—But that was a special time, and those were special saints! The whole Scripture knows nothing of that false reverence which would place Prophets and Apostles far above us, and beyond the reach of our imitation. Of every holy man it may be said, as it is here said of Elias—*he was a man like ourselves;* properly, a man of *like passions*, subject to the same weakness and sensation (as in Acts xiv. 15); no other than *a man*, in himself sinful, mortal, oppressed,—in himself of the same condition and character as we. He was as we are, and we like him: the grace of God which he possessed is equally open and ready for us. The power of God in him is also at our disposal, if we *pray* as he prayed; for Elijah, like every other man, obtained and accomplished that which makes him so great before our eyes, only through prayer. Then came the unknown, and never before mentioned, stranger from Gilead, and stood suddenly

like a messenger from heaven before the idolatrous king—"As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word!" (1 Kings xvii. 1). This sounds almost as if the Lord had sent him directly with only this message; but in the last word, "but according to my word," there is already hinted what the Apostle here conclusively explains: Elijah *had prayed a prayer* that it might not rain, and it rained not upon that *earth*—or, as we say, *in the land*—for three years and six months. Thus the long drought and dearth (the duration of which our Lord also, Luke iv. 25, so expressly marks) was invoked by the prayer of a man zealous for the honour of God, just as afterwards the fire was called down from heaven for a testimony. Thus, as St James probably would incidentally intimate, by this example, the effectual prayer of a righteous man may indeed call down punishments, judgments, and visitations upon sinners, may pray for salutary sickness instead of healing in the name of the Lord. But here it means pre-eminently—Become first what Elias was, who stood before the Lord, and then mayest thou do as Elias did. Then wilt thou also be able in due time to speak as he did, when the evil had endured long enough—*He prayed again*, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruits. This second prayer, with its urgency, is, notwithstanding the already presupposed granting of it, 1 Kings xviii. 41–45, expressly related; but it is remarkable that in the first verse of the chapter the Lord had already said to Elijah—Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth! Whence we should further learn, that prayers of this kind are appointed beforehand by the Lord Himself, and then by His Spirit put into the hearts of His servants; that both go together or meet—the power of God and the faith of man.

So much, however, is certain, that God would often give us such prayers, even in our day, if He found in us the requisite faith. As heaven and earth heard the voice of Elijah the man of God, so do all the powers of Nature still obey the voice of praying faith. The God of Elijah still liveth, and is the same; but the faith, the spirit, and the power of Elijah have become rare; he has few successors, who have received his mantle, to strike the waters with it. Where is the Lord God of Elijah?

(2 Kings ii. 14). And yet Christ saith to His disciples, that they in faith should do greater works than Himself had done; how much greater works than those of all the men of God before Him! He who can pray *in the name of Jesus*, hath the greatest promise and the most effectual strength. May the Lord increase in us the spirit of faith!

XXXII.

THE GREATEST NEED, AND THE GREATEST WORK OF FAITH.

(Ch. v. 19, 20.)

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

Faith does all! It is faith that is always in question! Faith it is that is wanting! This is the doctrine and testimony of the whole Epistle of St James, in common with all Scripture. Those who are rich in faith, and *therefore* heirs of the kingdom, heirs of the promise to those who love Him in faith, hath God chosen (ch. ii. 5). If I thus believe with Prophets and Apostles, if I thus believe with all the holy men who even before Christ were made righteous, and availed much, through faith—I also belong to all the chosen of God! Of every one of them it is said, as of Elias—He was *a man like ourselves*—concerning which word much more might be said. Even for the operation of faith and its effectual prayer upon external nature, so that heaven and earth must hearken to us, like Elijah, the word holds good also—We are, in God's power, of like power with him! Our faith may remove mountains (Matt. xvii. 20)—and why not now pray a brother into soundness? But we have already seen how St James wisely limited the exercise of faith in relation to this, and already hinted at the greater need of the soul, and to that which alone is good for the true raising up of the man. But he will not close his Epistle with this simple *hint;* he will more explicitly declare at the end what man's greatest distress is, and what his best help; consequently, what

is the greatest work of faith, which in its charity would bring God's help to a brother. No one should be tempted to think at the conclusion, in opposition to the tenor of the whole Epistle, that the *works* of faith which it demands are pre-eminently great things of the kind which Elijah wrought. The one great work of faith is *love*, which showeth *mercy;* that is, before and above all, the true mercy of God to the soul of a brother in sin.

Wherefore and to what end did Elijah pray first for drought, and then for rain? In order that the might and honour of the Lord against Baal might be manifest to all Israel, erring from the truth. He would fain by such signs have converted all the sinners from the error of their way, the whole people from their idolatry; but this indeed all his faith availed not to do, on account of the unbelief of those sinners. But we see, however, how consistent with all it is that St James should in the conclusion speak of the conversion of sinners. He shows us the *greatest need in the Church;* and here, where the least help and the utmost power of God is concerned, *the greatest work of faith*, which is mighty and effectual in love.

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth: this is much worse than what went before—Is any man sick among you? This is the real and greatest distress, which demands help from the faith which exists in the Church for the good of the brethren! If *any of you* err—this seems at first to have a gentle sound, like that other word—If a man be overtaken in a fault (Gal. vi. 1). But when we read on, we mark that St James means here a much greater *erring* than that. Indeed, brethren ought not to err or be overtaken in fault; every error, even of knowledge, from the truth, *might* be perilous in its consequences upon the life; although, in our state of partial knowledge, not every error of knowledge and understanding is actually hurtful, because the heart may be better than the head. But St James is not speaking of such slight, and possibly not dangerous, errors; he means an erring *from the truth* which is an actual *wandering*, an error of *the way*, in which the *sinner* walks. An Apostle says—I have no greater joy than to hear that my children *walk in the truth* (3 John 4); and every loving brother imitates him—I have no greater joy than this, to see my brethren walking in the truth. Consequently, there is no distress that troubles me more, than to see that there are many who walk in the error

of their ways! St James speaks afterwards of *death;* he means, therefore, a perfect and entire departure from the way of life. He does not say merely—And one *teach* him, or help him to right judgment; but he speaks of a needful and absolute *conversion* of the sinner.

And yet such a sinner is a man *among you*, a brother, a member of the Church of Christ! Verily, that there are such among us, is the greatest trouble of our times. Then, when St James wrote, the people with few exceptions came not unconverted into the community; and the growing up of those born in it was on the whole a sanctified growth in the blessing of grace. Therefore St James thought especially of those who had known the truth, but who had been unfaithful to it; of those also, the worst and most wretched, who had not relinquished the knowledge and the confession of the truth, but who were not obedient to it in the conduct of their life, who walked not in it. Thus here, if we would rightly apprehend our text, he does not speak of unbelievers without, the Jews and the heathens; nor of those who, like multitudes of heathens now, had never heard the word; nor of those who, like the Jews of that time, had heard the Gospel abundantly preached, but had never received it. The sinners to be converted were in the midst of the Church, bore the good Name by which we are called, had the word of truth in their lips—and yet walked in the error of their ways to death!

We *now* think naturally—looking at our present churches—of such people as in those days could scarcely have been found, but of whom, alas, there are very many now—ignorant, neglected, never rightly taught, much less converted, who yet are called Christians! This is never the case without fault of their own, because from their baptism upwards grace and truth has come near to them and offered itself in the ordinances of the Church; but never also without the guilt of others, who have neglected them and suffered them to stray. Alas, these are the most wretched of all blind in the way in which Christ is for ever passing by, but who know not to cry—Have pity on us! (Luke xviii. 35–39). They walk in the error of *their* way, *in death and unto death!* And then we think further of those who are misled and entangled in false doctrine, who hold the error of unbelief or superstition for truth, and walk accordingly. And

then we must, moreover, think of those who know without doing; of the people whose heads are filled with right knowledge, but who are without the faith of the heart and the obedience of the life; the corpses of faith without works, which are clothed only with words. But these most wretched ones are proud, and confident in their cry—Behold, we are not blind, but see; we live, and are not dead! Is not this for a lamentation in the congregation of God? Nevertheless, it is not merely any one man among us here or there; alas, many, many walk in all such errors of their way to death, erring variously from the truth! If it were only one who, being called a Christian, was in such a state—that would be incomparably a greater distress than if a brother or sister among us were naked and destitute of daily food. That such misery is frequent, that it is predominant in some of our fallen churches, is more lamentable than if plague and pestilence, dearth and famine, and all sorts of physical distress, were blighting us everywhere. This is the most piercing and crying need of souls, which should be helped of all who have faith and love to help it.

What then is *the greatest work of faith in love*, the most needful, the hardest, the most glorious, and at the same time the most obvious, work for every man who sees the need of his brother? *The converting of such sinners among us!* We, who have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, should not indeed forget the other sheep without, whom the good Pastor calls to Him, the heathens who are to be turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, nor Israel after the flesh, hardened, but not absolutely rejected! St James knew well that there were many, since Barnabas and Saul, of whom the Spirit had said—Separate them unto Me for the work to which I have called them! (Acts xiii. 2). Assuredly, he did not mean to invade the special province of those whose business it was to extend the Church by missionary labours; nor to interfere with the common duty of the brethren to maintain and forward on their journey those who thus go forth, and so to be fellow-helpers to the truth (3 John 8). But now he is speaking of the obvious, and as it were still more pressing, work of faith and love which is imposed upon every Christian, though by every Christian too easily neglected, of labouring to save the sinners in the Church! and to convert *whom* is, for two reasons,

more hard than to gather into the Church the heathens without. He among us who errs from the truth, who falls from the grace of baptism and the Church's ordinances—and such St James has in view,—opposes a mightier obstacle; similarly, more faith and love and patience are demanded in labouring among them, than are demanded in preaching to those who sit in the darkness of heathenism. Do we not all know, alas, that it is harder to preach to our fellow-townsmen and fellow-countrymen than to a strange people?—that working at a distance, with a certain consideration and respect shown to us, is more easy than the persevering grappling with those who are sinning around our very doors? How many of us are careless and weak-hearted in the face-to-face testimony which our neighbours require!

Nevertheless, because it is the greatest trouble of the Church that there are in it sinners walking the way of death, St James issues a most urgent summons, valid to this day, upon all whose hearts are free to work among the Lord's people. Brethren, if *any man* among you do err from the truth, and *any man* convert him:—by this general expression he teaches no other than that the obligation is urgent upon each on behalf of each. No man may dare to say, concerning any man whom he sees wandering in error with a multitude of sins—What have I to do with him? Am I called to convert him? Is, then, this great work a specific duty, for which a man must receive the setting apart of a new and express vocation? No, it is the natural and common impulse of all who live in the new birth, their first love, and their first vow of gratitude. He who has truly repented, has, like David in his penitential psalm, promised the Lord—So will I teach transgressors Thy way, that sinners may be converted to Thee (Ps. li. 15). Alas that so little afterwards remains of that converting zeal of first love which—however mocked, and however impure or unwise it may sometimes be—springs from the deepest fountain of grace! Alas that we so soon forget and neglect to pay our vows to the Lord!

Assuredly, it is a great thing to which St James calls every one who has faith and love to hear the call. Am I to *convert* the erring sinner before me, who is among us: what means that? I must bring him back *to the truth* from which he errs; bring him back to the right *way*, help him from *death* to *life!* I should bring him with a word of mine to Christ, who is the

way, the truth, and the life! How may this be? First of all, there must be the rectifying of the *error* of his way, the encountering his present ignorance with sound instruction, with good and patient testimony. It is the duty of every Christian to teach the ignorant, wherever he may find them. Utter not too rashly after the Apostle his solemn word—He that is ignorant, let him be ignorant! (1 Cor. xiv. 38). He said that, only after he had done faithfully all he could do, and while he was still doing all, to remove the ignorance; as not till the end of Scripture, after all the riches of grace and instruction, do we hear—He that is filthy, let him be filthy still! (Rev. xxii. 11). If the mind of Christ dwell in you, you will feel His compassion, and sympathise like Him with those who are ignorant and out of the way (Heb. v. 2). But then the speaking and teaching is not enough, even with regard to the pre-eminently ignorant, still less with those who know, without obeying, the truth. We must call them into the *way* of truth by meek *supplication;* we must lay hold of them, and guide them, yea, constrain them, by earnest *admonition;* we must take with us witnesses and helpers in this common work of God's power; some we must save with fear, pulling them with the violence of an angel out of the fire of Sodom (Jude 23). What a field in our days for the love of those who love, for the faith of those who believe! Many, however, will not be converted; but do not many only wait, and alas wait long in vain, until *one* shall undertake with all earnestness the work of his conversion? Lying in the way along which the priestly people walk, and finding even among Christians no good Samaritan to take compassion upon them! Indeed, to succour only one of these, demands much mighty, effectual love,—much of that love which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (1 Cor. xiii. 7)—much strong faith, from which alone such love can flow—much patience and labour, much *prayer* to the Lord for his poor soul. But all these expressions belong naturally and necessarily to a genuine and sound spirit and life of Christianity. What is the strongest, most enduring might in the salvation of souls around thee? Thy own holy conversation, thy walking in the light which shines around thee, thy own persevering progress in the way of life with firm and certain steps. Thus many were to be won by the conversation of their wives, without the word (1 Pet. iii. 1). No man will be

wanting in priestly works and fruits, of whom the Lord can utter the great testimony—The law of truth is in his mouth; he walketh with Me in peace and equity, and turneth many away from iniquity (Mal. ii. 6). He who is thus minded will never fail to desire to convert many from their sin; but *many* will, without any express will of his own, be enlightened and drawn by the silent energy of his holy life.

With friendly encouragement, St James tells us at the conclusion *why such a work is the greatest and most glorious!* He has no specific promise for it, he has no specific reward to offer; but the rich recompense is in the work itself; the act of *converting a sinner* is in itself so great and sublime, to be compared with no other in its glory and godlikeness. It accomplishes the will of God; it leads to the goal of all God's design and work for every erring and lost soul, that it should not perish. He who lays hold of this, should know that the brother who *hath* converted a sinner from the error of his way *hath saved a soul from death!* Luther thus expresses the greatness of the work accomplished; St James, however, has made it a promise, that the exhortation and stimulus may never cease: he that converteth the sinner *shall* help a soul from death, shall deliver him from death, shall *save him!* And, when he has experienced how glorious a thing it is to save one soul, he will strive to save a second, and then others; he will not rest with that first work of love. O let us put our hands to this most noble work, to save souls from the death of sin, from the damnation of hell! This is infinitely more than all benevolence to their bodily needs; and infinitely more than that lesser, and often useless work, of merely saving people from their errors, converting *from their opinions*,—possibly to *your own* opinions instead of to the truth, and to a holy life in the way of truth. But *woe* to every man who, on the other hand, *helps* a sinner on the way to death by seduction or offence; who, with his dead faith, buries the dead!

The Lord alone can help and save souls. But this He does through instruments of His power, vessels of His grace. Therefore the Scripture does not shrink from attributing boldly *to us* poor sinners the salvation of our fellow-sinners. The Apostle aimed to save some of his own people in the flesh (Rom. xi. 14). He promises Timothy the bishop, that in

doing his duty he should both save himself and those that heard him (1 Tim. iv. 16). Similarly he speaks of the wife saving her husband, and the husband saving his wife (1 Cor. vii. 16). Yes, brethren, we *may* save one another, and help one another to escape from death: this is a great blessing, the greatest and most precious promise of rich grace for our poor souls! When you would appropriate this in faith, your unbelieving fear may rise—Alas, so many are there of these wanderers and sinners in the Church, who may dare to set his hand to this work? But the text does not suppose that you are to convert them all; it does not even speak of many; but only of one, and primarily that one who most perplexes and grieves you, who is most directly thrust upon your regards. Make the beginning in thine own sphere; and neglect not the *one*, in thy anxiety for great things. Look not at what the sinner is in the world's view, neglect not and despise not the very least among them! For *one soul*, created by God, and which Christ hath purchased with His blood, is worth more than the whole world, which would be too small a price for its ransom. He who saveth one soul from death hath done a great work; he hath won for Christ a new heir of the inheritance, and for himself a brother thankful to all eternity.

He who shall effect this—says St James finally—*shall cover the multitude of sins;* or, a multitude of sins. What does he mean by that? Does it mean the sins of him who converts, as if his own trespasses were repaired and atoned for by the merit of this good work? Very far from it. He who would convert others, is understood to be converted himself; and therefore has no longer a multitude of sins to be covered. Otherwise, leave that work untouched, and care first for thine own soul! For if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch (Matt. xv. 14). St James speaks of the *sins* of the *sinner* who is converted; and would tell us, that in every individual sinner in the error of his ways there is a *multitude* of sins. Yea, verily, the life of man without grace and truth is full of nothing but sin, which waxes from day to day, eating round and round in endless corruption, until a final stop is put! Seest thou the sinner and the error of his way before thine eyes, then thou must see and know the multitude of his sins, without the necessity of his first confessing them. Then comes in the work

of *charity*, to *cover* transgressions and sins—as St James, like St Peter, quotes the saying of Solomon (1 Pet. iv. 8; Prov. x. 12). Thus, first, If thou hast love, thou wilt not be terrified at this multitude of sins, as if grace would no longer cover them; thou wilt not fear, as if nothing could be done; thou wilt not judge and condemn, as if salvation were impossible. Then, when before thine own eyes the sin of thy redeemed and called brother is covered, do thou thy best to bring him to the atonement for himself; set before him the mercy-seat, that he may actually receive forgiveness, and with it new life, freedom from sin, and sanctification unto final blessedness. This is very different from that false and effeminate covering of sin with the so-called mantle of charity; that will not suffice to cover and take away sin, either now or in the day of the Lord; their multitude will remain beneath it, unforgiven and unhealed.

Hide a multitude of sins! This is the remarkable abrupt conclusion of the whole Epistle; which adds no other word, that *this* one may ring out for ever. Let us observe, first, how St James here, also, in the last word once more derives all, all from the *grace of reconciliation;* and presupposes the entire new life of the sinner saved from sin, his walking in the truth, as the necessary result when the multitude of his former sins is truly covered. But let us observe, further, how he requires of those who have received grace, the works and energies of that grace which proceed from one soul to another! The last and most urgent cry of his heart—Save others from death, as the Lord has saved you! he utters in the form of affectionate promise; and with that he suddenly breaks off, as if nothing further or higher remained to be said. But this cry must be urged upon all for ever, as long as sinners are around us in the multitude of their sins. It is as if he had said—"Brethren, I have done my part in this Epistle, that none of you may remain in sin and error; but my Epistle has not accomplished all; all my exhortation and teaching will leave something yet to be done—let it be your care to do it among yourselves, that the work of salvation may go on!"

The same words let us hear for ourselves. The multitude of sinners' sins is, alas, most awfully before our eyes! Let him who can joyfully make his boast—Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered! (Ps. xxxii. 1)—

think of his neighbour, and desire to bring him to the same blessing! Let work in faith and labour in love (1 Thess. i. 3) go on in the Church for the *salvation of souls!* The word which has been preached to us, and dwelleth among us, is far from having accomplished its work! Christ hath died and risen again for all; but those who live are not yet His, not even in His Church. By His people He works, for the continual putting away of multitudes of sins; saving one soul after another from death. This is the work of the love which His Holy Spirit sheds abroad in the hearts of believers. *May this love never fail!* Amen.

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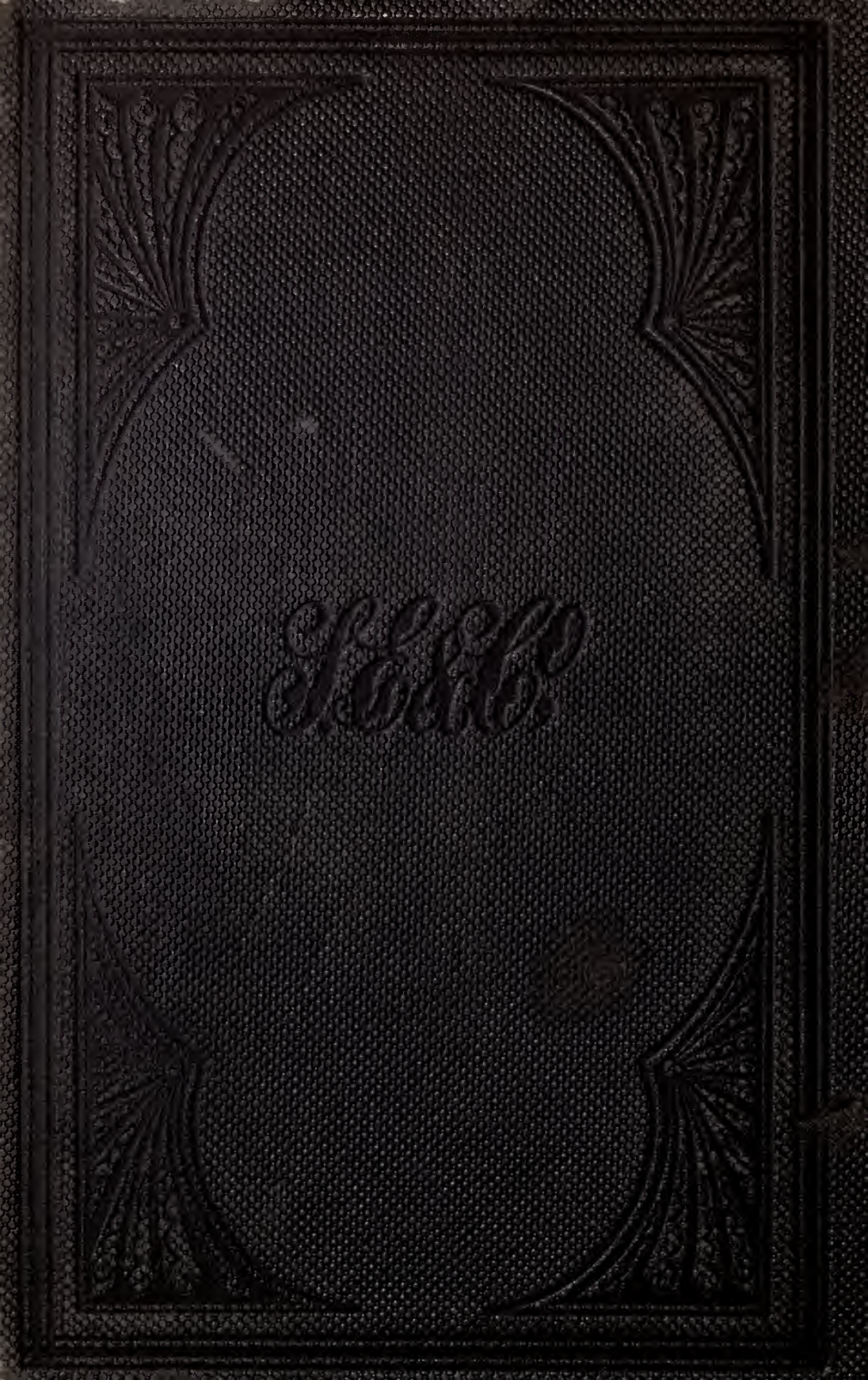
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